

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Today, Downtown Lowell has many of the elements thought by many to make up a successful and vibrant downtown. A remarkably appealing public realm, complete with interesting historic buildings, unique architecture and clean streets and sidewalks, overlays a solid base of business uses. The retail economy, while it struggles to generate foot traffic in the evenings and on weekends, serves downtown workers exceptionally well. The housing stock, although small, is showing signs of growth and increased diversity. The ample supply of public parking in Downtown Lowell is just beginning to reach capacity. Downtown Lowell claims a number of active and passionate supporters who are poised to continue Downtown's successes. Downtown Lowell appears ready to "turn the corner" and realize its vast potential.

Between May of 2000 and August of 2001, the Master Plan Team collected information on current land use, building use, vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns and the organizations who play a role in improving Downtown Lowell in an effort to identify relevant issues and to substantiate concerns brought forth in the public participation process. Areas surrounding Downtown Lowell, and the potential effects of ongoing planning initiatives in those areas were also evaluated for their effect on the Downtown Lowell economy.



Figure 3.1: Downtown Plan Boundaries



Planning Area Boundaries

For the purposes of this plan, the Master Plan Team has defined two areas of focus that are referenced throughout this study:

Downtown Planning Area

The Downtown Planning Area (**Figure 3.1**) encompasses a wide area in Downtown Lowell, including the Tsongas Arena, City Hall and many other elements that are widely considered to be integral components of the Downtown. The area is bounded:

- To the north by the Merrimack River from its confluence with the Concord River to the Western Canal;
- To the west by the Western Canal from the Merrimack River to Market Street, then along Market Street to Dutton Street and from Dutton Street to the Pawtucket Canal;
- To the South by the Pawtucket Canal from Market Street to Central Street, then Central Street along to Towers Corner, then from Towers Corner along Church Street to the Concord River.

Downtown Core

A greater level of study was focused on the Downtown Core. The traditional heart of Downtown Lowell, the Core is where the majority of the retail and office uses are located. The Downtown Core encompasses historic commercial properties located along Merrimack Street from Kearney Square to Arcand Drive, along the duration of Middle Street, along Market Street from Central Street to Dutton Street, along Central Street from Towers Corner to Merrimack Street, and along the duration of John, Shattuck and Palmer Streets.

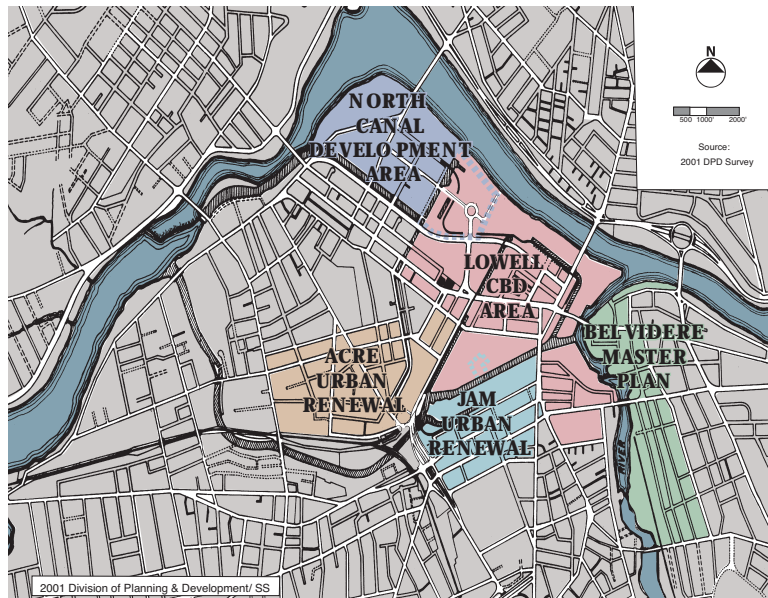


Figure 3.2: Boudaries of recent Division of Planning & Development study areas



Acre Neighborhood Urban Revitalization Plan (1999)

Surrounding Neighborhoods

A key ingredient of any successful downtown is the support of the communities and neighborhoods that exist on the perimeter of downtown. Adjacent residential communities can provide a source of customers for Downtown Lowell retailers and other businesses as well as homes for Downtown Lowell's workers. These areas can also provide an area for future extension of a downtown or act as gateways to a downtown. The first impression of a downtown area is often generated by the experiences visitors have with the neighborhood through which they must pass to get to the downtown. Enhancements and support of these areas are, therefore, essential.

Currently, the City of Lowell is engaged in a number of revitalization strategies in the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown Lowell (Figure 3.2). Revitalization of the Acre Neighborhood, the Jackson/Appleton/Middlesex Corridor and the East Merrimack/Lower Belvidere districts will all be crucial to overall enhancement of Downtown Lowell.

Acre Neighborhood Urban Revitalization and Development Plan

City government, its private sector partners along with the community have recently initiated a \$40 million comprehensive revitalization program for the southern end of the neighborhood. A central goal of the Acre Plan is to improve the quality of life for residents by creating a place where residents will live and perhaps walk to work at one of the restored mills, and enjoy the Downtown and all of its new venues. The Plan proposes opportunities for new housing on sites that are currently vacant or used marginally. One of the cornerstones of the project will be a new middle school set to serve as an anchor to the community. Downtown Lowell can only benefit by the creation of a stable residential base, immediately adjacent to the Downtown.

JAM Urban Revitalization and Development Project

The Jackson/Appleton/Middlesex (JAM) revitalization area is envisioned to be a vibrant and thriving commercial and industrial district adjacent to Downtown Lowell. The area, currently dominated by vacant textile mill buildings, boasts exceptional access to major highways and public transit and possesses tremendous development potential. The City has plans to acquire a number of vacant mill buildings and lots in order to assemble sites large enough to be attractive to developers. The City also proposes to introduce two new parks along with walkways throughout the area, as well as improvements to existing streetways, creating a more attractive and competitive commercial district. The first phase of the JAM Plan will include the construction of a 1,000 space parking garage between Jackson Street and Middlesex Street, which will help to alleviate a parking shortage nearby locations in the Downtown Core. Downtown Lowell will benefit from the revitalization of this languishing mill district as this area will prove to be a major regional job generator.

East Merrimack Street/Lower Belvidere Plan

Located at the confluence of the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, the East Merrimack/Lower Belvidere community provides a key gateway to downtown Lowell and is central in the Downtown Lowell's redevelopment strategy. Master planning elements to date include proposals for a new Downtown Lowell gateway, a riverfront plaza and park, trails, recreation facilities, new development parcels and pedestrian bridges that provide strong linkages and connections between the residential community and the downtown. Key development components will include:

- The development of a new 200,000 sq. ft. comprehensive court building on Davidson Street. This will consolidate the various courts scattered throughout Lowell. This will improve efficiency within the court system and invigorate the area with thousands of people visiting each day, encouraging additional development. Lowell is the next city scheduled to receive this funding from the Commonwealth for this project.
- The development of a Cultural and Performing Arts Center on East Merrimack Street. Proposed by Middlesex Community College to house its expanding performing arts curriculum, the CAPAC will provide Downtown with another performing arts destination venue.
- A 180,000 sq. ft. mixed-use office/retail development and adjacent parking garage.

Lawrence Manufacturing Mills Redevelopment

Strategically located between the Paul E. Tsongas Arena and LeLacheur Park, this vacant mill complex is in the process of being redeveloped into luxury loft condominium units, commercial space and the new home of the UMass Lowell Graduate School of Education. This development will create another major activity center adjacent to Downtown Lowell and fill an important gap along the North Canal Area and Riverwalk.

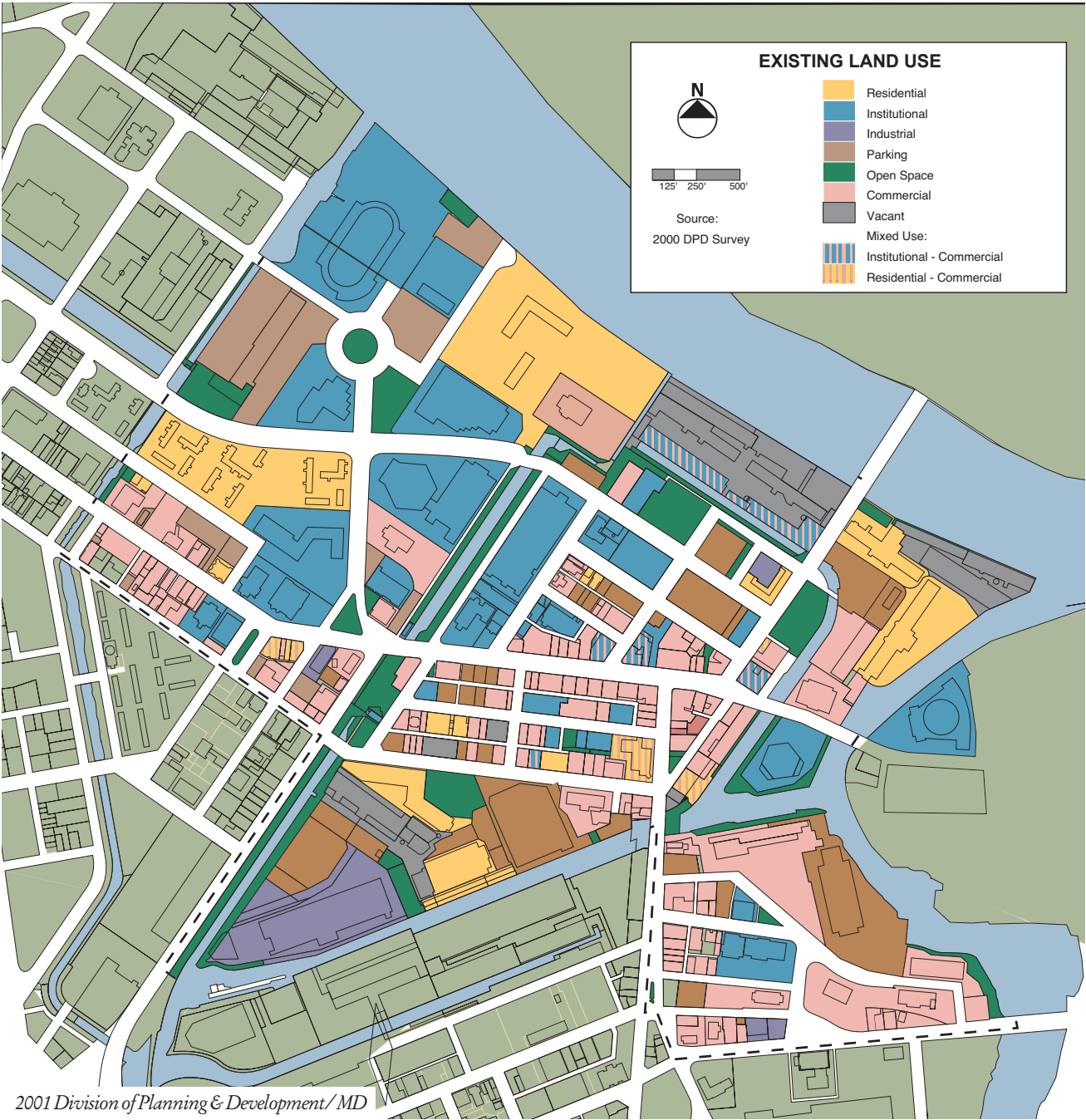


East Merrimack Corridor



View of Lawrence Manufacturing Mills

Figure 3.3: Existing Land Use



Land Use

The Master Plan Team inventoried the land and building use within the Downtown Planning Area in order to better understand the physical makeup of Downtown Lowell. This analysis is detailed as part of the **Existing Land Use Map** shown in **Figure 3.3** and the corresponding data summarized in **Table 3.1**.

The Downtown Core area exhibits the typical mix of commercial, residential and institutional uses prevailing in many downtown areas in the region. Overall, a majority of the Downtown Planning Area is utilized by institutional (48.2%) and commercial (20.1%) users. Century-old, brick commercial buildings on small lots make up most of the Core area of Merrimack, Middle, Market and Central Streets, with mostly retail uses on the ground floor area and varying amounts of office and residential uses on the upper floors.

Large sites hosting complexes of former textile mill buildings are located at the edges of the Downtown Core are in various stages of renovation and use. The Boott Cotton Mills complex is home to commercial office space. Massachusetts Mills, Market Mills and Canal Place are home to residential apartments and condominiums.

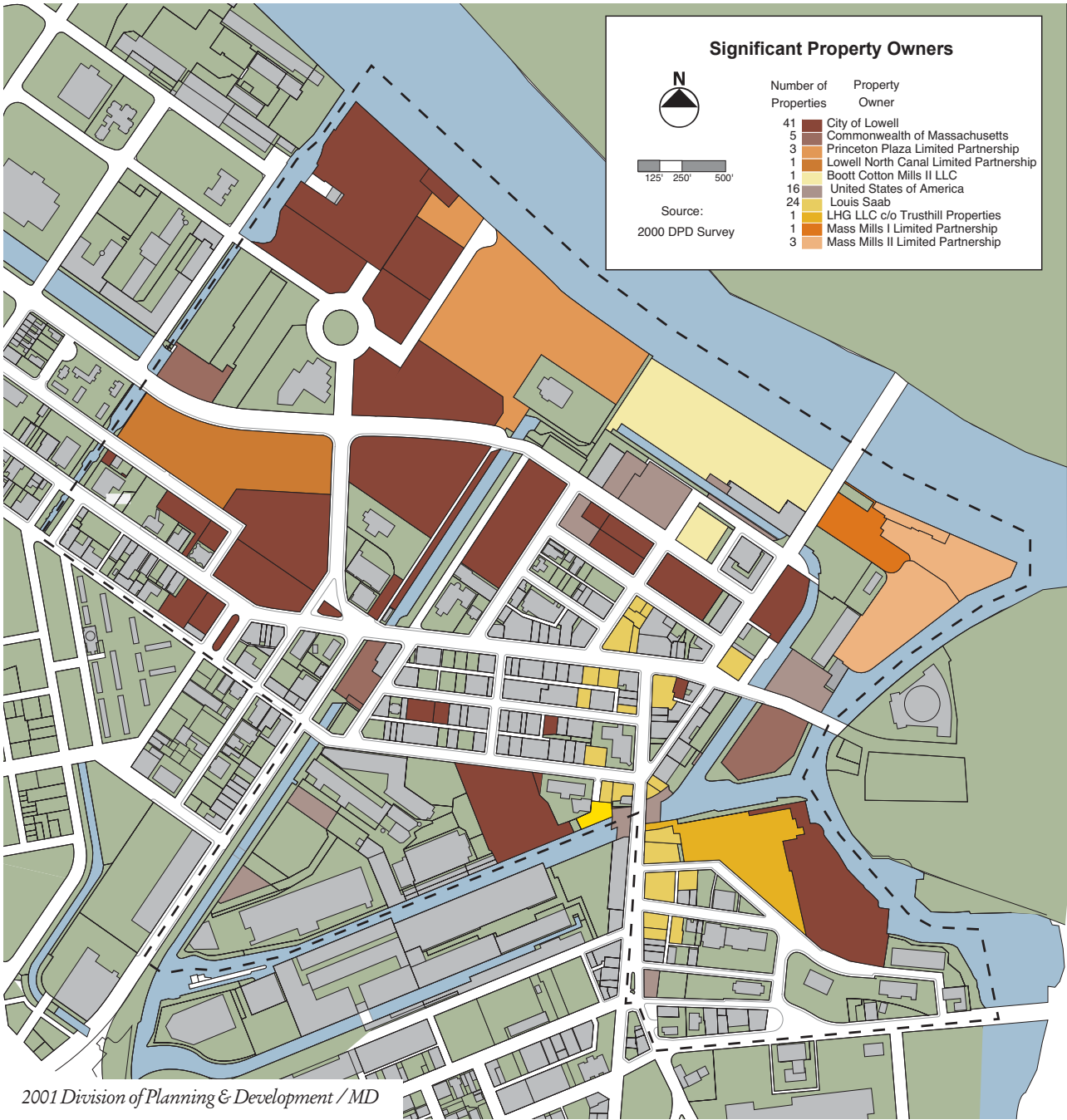
Further away from the Downtown Core, commercial, residential and institutional uses are located in modern mid-rise and high-rise buildings, surrounded by parking lots. Northwest of the Downtown Core, housing projects at River Place Towers and North Canal Apartments and institutional uses such as the Lowell High School expansion and the JFK Civic Center were constructed on sites cleared by urban renewal. New buildings such as the Tsongas Arena and a post office are new buildings that continue the institutional flavor of this area. East of the Downtown Core, Middlesex Community College now occupies a site at Kearney Square which was first built for Wang Laboratories in the 1980. Across the Pawtucket Canal sits the DoubleTree Hotel, developed in conjunction with the MCC site. Industrial uses have only a minium presence in Downtown Lowell.

Table 3.1: Land Use

| Land Use | Land Area (square feet) | % Of Total Land Area |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Commercial | 1,128,630 | 20.1% |
| Industrial | 76,476 | 1.4% |
| Institutional | 2,704,884 | 48.2% |
| Open Space | 201,026 | 3.6% |
| Mixed Use - Commercial and Institutional | 2,778 | 0.1% |
| Mixed Use - Commercial and Residential | 224,762 | 4.0% |
| Parking Lot | 325,541 | 5.8% |
| Residential | 785,013 | 13.9% |
| Vacant Building | 210,230 | 3.7% |
| TOTAL | 5,616,454 | 100.0% |

Source: 2000 DPD Survey

Figure 3.4: Significant Property Owners



Property Ownership

Property ownership in Downtown Lowell is dominated by a handful of public and private sector owners.

Government dominates Downtown Lowell, controlling almost 50% of the land in the planning area. Lowell City Hall and municipal complex, Lowell High School, other Lowell School Department facilities, the National Park Service, Middlesex Community College, various churches and several City-owned parking garages are among the major institutional users occupying significant space. The two largest land owners in the Downtown Planning Area—the City of Lowell and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts—control almost fifty percent of the land. As shown in **Figure 3.4** and **Table 3.2**, and **Table 3.3** three of the top fifteen property owners in the Downtown Planning Area, in terms of both land area and building area, are governmental organizations.

Privately-owned sites are highlighted by the former textile mill properties at the edge of the Downtown Core. Various investors have developed these sites into a number of uses, including market-rate and subsidized housing and commercial office space. Within the Downtown Core, one owner, Louis Saab controls a large percentage of the historic commercial properties.

This pattern of ownership has conflicting implications. Since the public sector clearly controls large portions of Downtown Lowell, future development proposals and outstanding issues affecting Downtown Lowell will be decided by the people these public entities represent. Efforts to change Downtown Lowell should be easier with only a few, relatively large stakeholders. However, the few significant private-sector landlords still have the ability to avoid efforts to improve Downtown Lowell and can impact Downtown Lowell in a negative way.

Of particular concern is Louis Saab, and the portfolio of 24 properties that he controls. Purchased during lows in the local real estate market, these properties are well maintained on the exterior, but have lacked considerable periodic investment. Many of the buildings remain largely vacant, especially on the upper stories. Over the years many have noted that Mr. Saab appears unwilling to invest in his properties and actively seek tenants. Instead, properties sit idle for long periods of time. Unfortunately, there is little leverage the City, or any other entity, can exert upon this owner to compel him to invest in his properties.

Table 3.2: Property Ownership by Land Area

| Property Owner | Total Land Area (Sq. Ft.) | % of Total Area | # of Properties |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| City of Lowell | 1,352,021 | 24.1% | 41 |
| Commonwealth of Massachusetts | 1,046,999 | 18.6% | 5 |
| Mass Mills Limited Partnership (I, II, III) | 328,676 | 5.9% | 6 |
| Princeton Plaza Limited Partnership | 312,793 | 5.6% | 3 |
| Lowell North Canal Limited Partnership | 210,217 | 3.8% | 1 |
| Boott Cotton Mills, LLC | 198,423 | 3.6% | 1 |
| United States of America | 182,585 | 3.3% | 16 |
| Louis Saab | 155,191 | 2.8% | 24 |
| LHG LLC c/o Trusthill Properties | 131,192 | 2.3% | 1 |
| Fred C. Church, Inc. | 96,144 | 1.7% | 4 |
| Market Mills Associates | 89,860 | 1.6% | 3 |
| Lowell Doctors Park Trust | 62,293 | 1.1% | 1 |
| Gateway Center Corporation | 60,730 | 1.1% | 3 |
| Total | 5,616,454 | | |

City of Lowell Board of Assessors

Table 3.3: Property Ownership by Building Area

| Property Owner | Total Building Area (Sq. Ft.) | % of Total Area |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| City of Lowell | 1,405,074 | 26.0% |
| Boott Cotton Mills, LLC | 522,159 | 9.9% |
| Louis Saab | 390,405 | 7.4% |
| Market Mills Assoc. | 278,029 | 5.3% |
| LHG LLC c/o Trusthill Properties | 189,422 | 3.6% |
| Princeton Plaza Limited Partnership | 186,520 | 3.5% |
| Mass Mills I Limited Partnership | 185,172 | 3.5% |
| Mass Mills II Limited Partnership | 174,135 | 3.3% |
| Commonwealth of MA | 134,314 | 2.6% |
| Lowell North Canal Partnership | 125,819 | 2.4% |
| All others | 1,644,586 | 31.4% |
| Total | 5,235,635 | 100.0% |

City of Lowell Board of Assessors

Figure 3.5: Buildings with Vacancies



Vacancy

Downtown Lowell has been the recipient of a number of interesting and successful redevelopment projects over the past twenty-five years that have transformed the Downtown into a vibrant place. Relatively few, persistent vacancies remain a problem in Downtown Lowell. However, there are a few areas where vacant buildings still dominate or where vacancies on the first floors of buildings cause many to perceive that vacancies are a major problem.

Vacant Mill Properties

Substantial portions of a number of major mill properties remain vacant. Within the Boott Cotton Mills, Massachusetts Mills and the Canal Place/Market Mills complex, whole buildings remain vacant next to successfully rehabilitated mills. In each case, the sheer size of the mill complex combined with unstable market conditions, limited parking and access, contribute to vacancies. In each case, the final, and most costly phase of a three phase project has not been addressed. Redevelopment of each of these sites will only happen as improvements in the real estate market continue and a clear plan is developed to comprehensively address barriers to development

Vacancies within the Downtown Core

Quite a different problem, smaller vacant buildings are found scattered around the Downtown Core. Vacancies are generally caused by building owners unwilling to invest in their buildings or actively seeking to fill their space. As a result of disinvestment, tenants seek other space and new tenants are not found. Currently in Downtown Lowell, owners who are motivated to find quality tenants and regularly invest in their properties have been able to fill their space.

The City has been successful in acquiring vacant properties and selling them to developers who are motivated to invest. On Middle Street, the Ayer Lofts is an example of a property acquired by the City through tax-title foreclosure and then sold and developed successfully into artist lofts. The City is now in the process of doing the same at the D.L Paige Building, which is currently vacant on Merrimack Street.



The long-vacant Spaulding Building on Central Street

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD



Wannalancit Mills



Old City Hall on Merrimack Street

Office Inventory

Tenants of office space provide a major source of activity in Downtown Lowell, particularly from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. during weekdays. To better understand this segment of the Downtown Lowell economy the Master Plan Team, in August 2000, conducted an inventory of businesses in the Downtown Core on a building-by-building basis.

Office space in Downtown Lowell is found in two major types of settings: renovated mill space in large, professionally managed office complexes and on the upper stories of renovated commercial buildings in the Downtown Core.

Renovated Mill Complexes

Approximately 650,000 sq. ft. of office space exists at the Boott Cotton Mills, at various stages of development. Currently 200,000 sq. ft. are fully renovated and completely leased, while another 200,000 sq. ft. are undergoing renovation and will be ready by the end of 2002. Another 250,000 sq. ft. are available in the final phase of the project, but this portion remains unimproved and vacant. Tenants in the Boott Cotton Mills include a wide variety of office users, from environmental service firms, to lawyers and a number of high technology companies.

Although out of the Downtown Plan area, the Wannalancit Mills also has a significant impact upon the Downtown Lowell economy. The site is home to a number of office users as well as the UMass Lowell Research Foundation

Downtown Core Upper-story Space

Over 813,933 sq. ft. of upper-story office space is in the Downtown Core. This space is characterized by high vacancy rates and varying levels of quality and renovation. Almost 25% of the office space, or 238,233 sq. ft., is vacant. One individual, Louis Saab, owns over 100,000 sq. ft. of this space. A variety of different individuals own the remaining space.

New office construction and modern offices in the Downtown is limited by the lack of vacant and developable land in the Downtown. Since 1964, only three new general-purpose office buildings have been built in the Downtown Planning area: the 21 George Street Building, Gateway I, and Gateway II. All three buildings are located in the southeast corner of the Downtown Planning Area, on sites cleared in the 1960s under urban renewal.

The variety of businesses located in the upper story office space in Downtown can be seen in **Table 3.4**, which breaks these businesses down according to NAICS code.

Table 3.4: Upper Story Office Space Tenants by NAICS Code

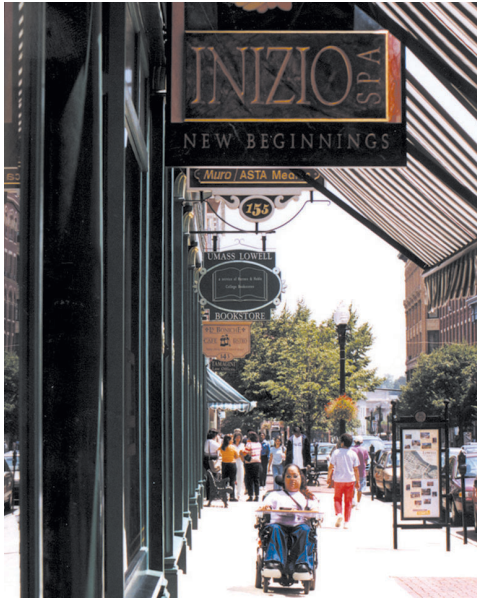
| 4 Digit NAICS Code - Business Type | Number of Businesses | Total Sq. Ft. | Average Sq. Ft. / Business |
|---|----------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 4214 - Professional and Commercial Equipment Supplies and Wholesalers | 2 | 20,294 | 10,147 |
| 4431 - Electronics and Appliance Stores | 1 | 1,408 | 1,408 |
| 4441 - Building Materials and Supply Dealers | 1 | 8,400 | 8,400 |
| 4481 - Clothing Stores | 1 | 16,203 | 16,203 |
| 4511 - Sporting Goods, Hobby and Musical Instrument Stores | 1 | 14,553 | 14,553 |
| 4543 - Direct Selling Establishments | 2 | 5,530 | 2,765 |
| 5111 - Newspaper, Periodical, Book and Database Publishers | 1 | 46,964 | 46,964 |
| 5121 - Motion Picture and Video Industries | 1 | 994 | 994 |
| 5211 - Monetary Authorities - Central Bank | 5 | 53,883 | 10,776 |
| 5222 - Non-Depository Credit Intermediation | 3 | 5,953 | 1,984 |
| 5311 - Lessors of Real Estate | 4 | 8,445 | 2,111 |
| 5313 - Activities Related to Real Estate | 2 | 1,887 | 943 |
| 5411 - Legal Services | 35 | 97,129 | 2,775 |
| 5412 - Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping and Payroll Services | 1 | 1,500 | 1,500 |
| 5414 - Specialized Design Services | 2 | 4,532 | 2,266 |
| 5415 - Computer Systems Design and Related Services | 4 | 15,401 | 3,850 |
| 5417 - Scientific Research and Development Services | 2 | 30,494 | 15,247 |
| 5418 - Advertising and Related Services | 2 | 5,794 | 2,897 |
| 5616 - Investigation and Security Services | 1 | 867 | 867 |
| 5619 - Other Support Services | 1 | 8,600 | 8,600 |
| 6113 - Colleges, Universities and Professional Schools | 2 | 32,739 | 16,369 |
| 6116 - Other Schools of Instruction | 1 | 4,783 | 4,783 |
| 6211 - Offices of Physicians | 4 | 19,093 | 4,773 |
| 6212 - Offices of Dentists | 3 | 3,806 | 1,268 |
| 6213 - Offices of Other Health Practitioners | 6 | 22,129 | 3,688 |
| 6214 - Outpatient Care Centers | 2 | 12,514 | 6,257 |
| 6241 - Individual and Family Services | 10 | 42,527 | 4,252 |
| 7115 - Independent Artists, Writers and Performers | 1 | 1,470 | 1,470 |
| 7221 - Full Service Restaurants | 2 | 5,236 | 2,618 |
| 7224 - Drinking Places | 2 | 9,494 | 4,747 |
| 8132 - Grant-Making and Giving Services | 2 | 6,485 | 3,242 |
| 8133 - Social Advocacy Organizations | 1 | 1,500 | 1,500 |
| 8139 - Business, Professional, Labor, Political and Similar Organizations | 4 | 36,764 | 9,191 |
| 9211 - Executive, Legislative and Other General Government Support | 7 | 67,929 | 9,704 |
| 9221 - Justice, Public Order and Safety Activities | 1 | 2,360 | 2,360 |
| TOTALS | 120 | 617,660 | 5,147 |

Source: DPD Survey – 2000



Gateway Center

Photo: Higgins & Ross



Sidewalk activity along Merrimack Street: the heart of the Downtown Lowell shopping district
Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD



The Southeast Asian business cluster along upper Merrimack Street, north of City Hall

Photo:DPD

Retail Inventory

During August 2000, the Division of Planning and Development (DPD) conducted an inventory of businesses in the Downtown Core on a store-by-store and building-by-building basis. The inventory identified approximately 533,663 square feet of ground-level storefront space in the Downtown Core and 145 storefronts in the Downtown Core. The inventory includes the name and address of each business, the business type and the estimated square footage of street level spaces.

A healthy variety of retailers operate in Downtown Lowell. As is shown in **Tables 3.4 and 3.5**, the most prevalent categories of retailers include health and personal care stores, book, periodical and music stores, clothing stores and restaurants.

A majority of the retail and restaurant businesses are locally-owned, independent enterprises. While a number of independently-owned stores do quite well, many utilize merchandising and display techniques that are less uniform than those used by major chain retailers.

There still exists a healthy mix of national and regional chains such as Burger King, CVS, Barnes & Noble and Dunkin Donuts. These national chain businesses provide credibility to a downtown retail environment.

Business Clusters

Business clusters are defined as a group of businesses that serve the same or related markets. Among smaller businesses, collocating is extremely positive since these groupings generate several stops for shopping within an area of the Downtown. The cluster effect gives shoppers variety within a shopping area and generates healthy levels of competition amongst businesses.

The most identifiable cluster within the Downtown is the Southeast Asian cluster located on Merrimack Street across from City Hall. Approximately fourteen Southeast Asian businesses are located in this portion of Merrimack Street. These businesses span from traditional restaurants to grocery stores to video rental facilities. Not only do these businesses attract individuals from the Downtown, they also attract shoppers from the Acre and Lower Highlands neighborhoods of the City.

Other notable clusters in Downtown Core include the proliferation of low cost or used merchandise establishments including a pawnshop, a number of dollar stores, which is

located near the intersection of Bridge and Merrimack Streets. Another easily identifiable business cluster is located at the intersection of Merrimack and Palmer Streets, where many of the higher price retail establishments and quality restaurants have begun to locate.

Downtown Anchors

An anchor can be defined as a use that generates a high number of visits to the area. In the context of a suburban shopping mall, anchors are traditionally defined as large retail stores, especially department stores. Large department stores have left urban locations for the more spacious areas in the suburbs. With them left many smaller national chain retailers. As a result, downtown locations nationwide have had to develop new strategies to attract customers to support the remaining downtown merchants.

Downtown Lowell has successfully transitioned from the early nineteen nineties, when

Table 3.5: Downtown Core Retail Businesses by NAICS Code

| NAICS Code - Business Type | Number of Businesses | Total Sq. Ft. | Average Sq. Ft. |
|---|----------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 4422 – Home Furnishing Stores | 2 | 5,174 | 2,587 |
| 4431 – Electronic and Appliance Stores | 1 | 858 | 858 |
| 4442 – Lawn and Garden Equipment Stores | 1 | 4,200 | 4,200 |
| 4452 – Specialty Food Stores | 2 | 2,930 | 1,465 |
| 4453 – Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores | 2 | 3,327 | 1,664 |
| 4461 – Health and Personal Care Stores | 3 | 10,662 | 3,554 |
| 4481 – Clothing Stores | 6 | 27,158 | 4,526 |
| 4482 – Shoe Stores | 1 | 5,326 | 5,326 |
| 4483 – Jewelry, Luggage and Leather Stores | 5 | 7,890 | 1,578 |
| 4511 – Sporting Goods, Hobby and Instruments Stores | 2 | 7,103 | 3,552 |
| 4512 – Book, Periodical and Music Stores | 4 | 12,645 | 3,161 |
| 4529 – Other General Merchandise Stores | 2 | 7,074 | 3,537 |
| 4531 – Florists | 2 | 4,110 | 2,055 |
| 4533 – Used Merchandise Stores | 3 | 8,455 | 2,818 |
| 4539 – Other Misc. Merchandise Stores | 1 | 2,810 | 2,810 |
| TOTALS | 37 | 109,722 | 2,965 |

Source: DPD Survey – 2000

Table 3.6: Downtown Core Restaurants by NAICS Code

| NAICS Code - Business Type | Number of Businesses | Total Sq. Ft. | Average Sq. Ft. |
|--|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 7221 – Full Service Restaurants | 21 | 56,718 | 2,701 |
| 7222 – Limited Service Eating Places | 2 | 2,139 | 1,070 |
| 7224 – Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages) | 4 | 11,867 | 2,967 |
| TOTALS | 27 | 70,724 | 2,246 |

Source: DPD Survey – 2000



Offices for the United Way occupy a potentially valuable retail space at the corner of Merrimack and John Street.

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD

Jordan Marsh and Cherry, Webb & Tourraine left Downtown Lowell. The Downtown Lowell retail market now relies on non-retail anchors to draw customers to Downtown Lowell. Major institutional anchors, such as Lowell City Hall, Lowell High School and Middlesex Community College, and major attractions such as the Lowell National Historical Park, the Paul E. Tsongas Arena, the Lowell Memorial Auditorium and LeLacheur Park currently serve as major generators of foot traffic in the Downtown. These anchors provide Downtown Lowell with a steady stream of customers and a good base on which to enhance the retail mix.

Underutilized Storefronts

The retail vacancy rate is relatively low in the Downtown Retail Office Core (**Figure 3.5 and Table 3.7**). Only 8% of the 1st floor storefront space in the Downtown Core is vacant. For an older central business district that is not located on a major highway, these statistics show that Downtown Lowell is doing relatively well in terms of filling these storefront spaces.

Despite a low vacancy rate, the highest and best use of these storefronts is often not attained. Most successful downtowns have a high proportion of retail and service retail uses in first floor storefront space. Generally, the presence of retail uses in first floor storefronts creates foot traffic and generates street-level activity, further enhancing the retail experience of patrons. Other uses, such as institutional or office, often create “dead zones.” The number of non-retail storefronts in Downtown Lowell tends to be high, running at over 60%. General office related uses, including lawyer and doctor offices, generate the vast majority of additional underutilized storefront space in the Downtown.

While underutilized storefronts are not as problematic as a vacant storefront, the underutilization of storefronts creates a new set of problems for the Downtown. First, office and institutional uses in storefronts limit the amount of potential street-level activity and pedestrian traffic in Downtown Lowell. Outside of lunchtime, these uses can create unusually quiet shopping hours.. Also, retail establishments may have few possibilities for locations if storefronts are occupied by a large number of office or institutional uses.

Figure 3.5: First Floor Building Use within the Downtown Core

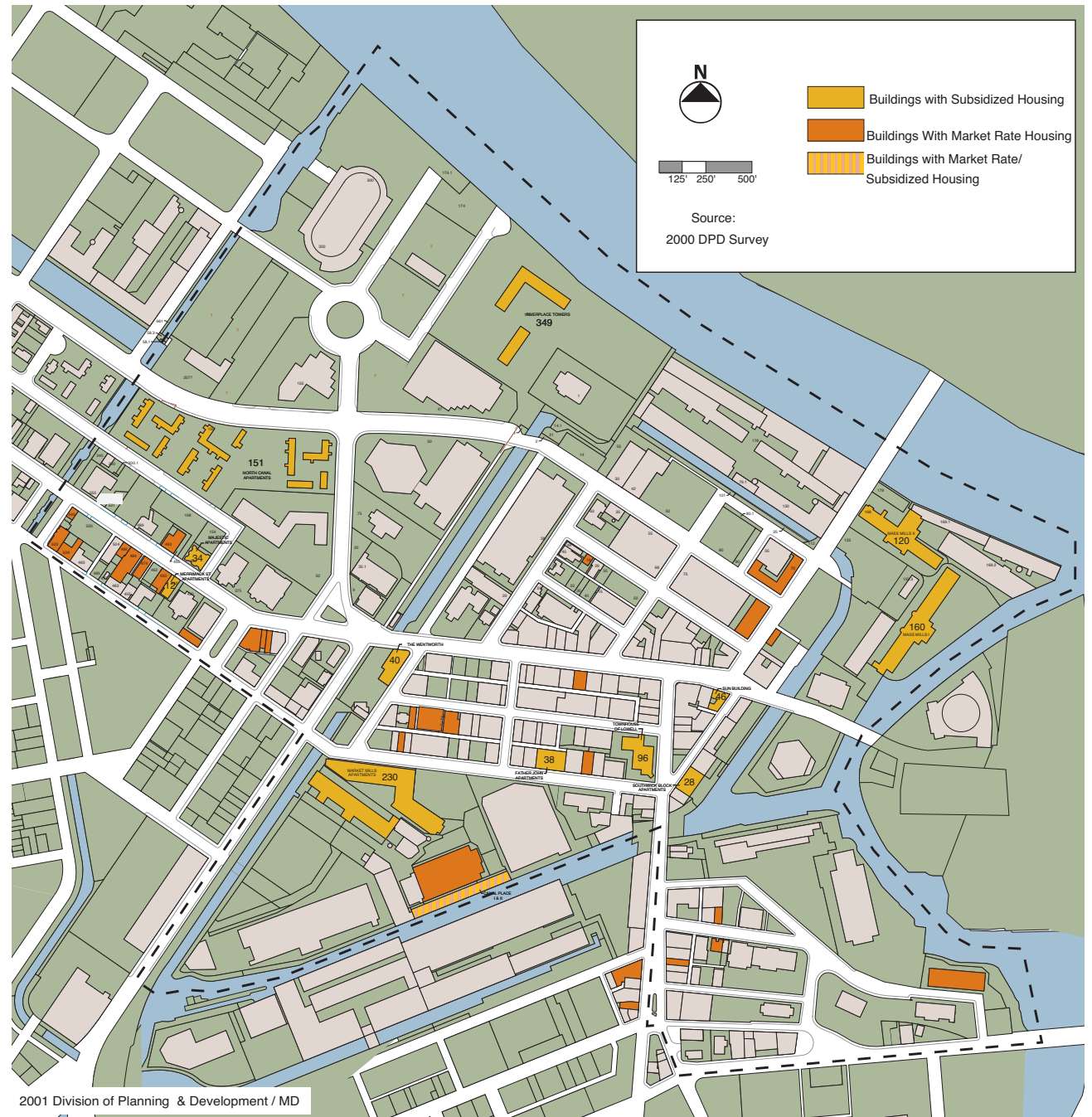


| Table 3.7: First Floor Building Use - Downtown Core | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Category | Total Floor Area (sq. ft.) | % of Total |
| Apparel/Accessories | 40,374 | 8% |
| Auto | 0 | 0% |
| Bank | 48,699 | 9% |
| Health and Personal Care | 7,989 | 1% |
| Education | 23,641 | 4% |
| Food | 5,069 | 1% |
| General Merchandise | 1,792 | 0% |
| Home Furnishings | 9,689 | 2% |
| Institutional | 68,449 | 13% |
| Media | 23,059 | 4% |
| Misc Retail | 16,242 | 3% |
| Museum | 15,471 | 3% |
| Office Support Services | 3,131 | 1% |
| Personal Service | 43,154 | 8% |
| Professional Service | 60,859 | 11% |
| Recreation | 0 | 0% |
| Residential | 19,726 | 4% |
| Restaurant | 68,585 | 13% |
| Specialty Retail | 36,006 | 7% |
| Vacant | 41,728 | 8% |
| Total | 533,663 | 100% |
| Total Retail | 109,172 | 20% |

Source: DPD Survey, 2000

DOWNTOWN LOWELL MASTER PLAN

Figure 3.6: Buildings With Residential Use



Housing

U.S. Census data and other surveys conducted by the Master Plan Team were used to analyze the stock of housing within Downtown Lowell.

Downtown Lowell has experienced a dramatic increase in housing units over the past thirty years. Industrial uses have been converted to a variety of types of residential condominium and apartment developments, gradually building up a stable population of inhabitants in Downtown Lowell. Housing units within Downtown Lowell are found in three basic types of buildings:

- Subsidized, large-scale apartment complexes developed on sites cleared during the 1960s and 1970s (example: River Place Towers);
- Subsidized, elderly rental housing developed in renovated mills and downtown commercial buildings during the 1970s and 1980s (example: Sun Building, Market Mills);
- Market-rate condominium and apartment units developed in renovated mills and Downtown Lowell buildings during the 1980s and 1990s (example: Ayer Lofts, Canal Place).

Housing Tenure

A majority of the housing units in Downtown Lowell are renter-occupied. As is summarized in **Table 3.8**, 90.1% of residential units in Downtown Lowell are rental units. Despite the opening of Ayer Lofts in the Summer of 2000, adding 51 owner-occupied units, such units are in the overwhelming minority.

The percentage of renter-occupied units is considerably higher than other areas. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the percentage of renter-occupied units in Tract 3101, which includes an area larger than the Downtown Planning Area, is 92.4%. This rate is far greater than that of the city of Lowell (57%) and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (38%). This data suggests that the population of Downtown Lowell is likely to be less stable over the long-term.

Rental Rates

Rents paid by Downtown Lowell residents have risen considerably over time. As shown in **Table 3.9**, the median gross rent collected from housing units within Census Tract 3101 increased from \$143.22 in 1970 to \$499.14 in 1990 (in constant, inflation-adjusted dollars). Although the majority of residents in the Downtown still pay relatively low rents, these trends tend to show that the Downtown can support higher rent levels over time.

Table 3.8: Housing Tenure

| | Tract 3101 | | Lowell | | Massachusetts | |
|-----------------------|------------|------|--------|-----|---------------|------|
| | Units | % | Units | % | Units | % |
| Occupied units | 1,930 | 100 | 37,887 | 100 | 2,443,580 | 100 |
| Owner-occupied units | 147 | 7.6 | 16,309 | 43 | 1,508,052 | 61.7 |
| Renter-occupied units | 1,783 | 92.4 | 21,578 | 57 | 935,528 | 38.3 |

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

Table 3.9: Gross Rent (Census Tract 3101)*

| Gross Rent | 1970 | | 1980 | | 1990 | |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| | Units | % | Units | % | Units | % |
| Less Than \$99 | 580 | 92.5 | 161 | 15.6 | 100 | 7.3 |
| \$100 to \$199 | 47 | 7.5 | 366 | 35.5 | 295 | 21.4 |
| \$200 to \$299 | - | - | 432 | 41.9 | 201 | 14.6 |
| \$300 to \$399 | - | - | 73 | 7.0 | 222 | 16.1 |
| \$400 to \$499 | - | - | - | - | 230 | 16.7 |
| \$500 to \$599 | - | - | - | - | 232 | 16.8 |
| \$600 to \$699 | - | - | - | - | 80 | 5.8 |
| \$700 to \$749 | - | - | - | - | 33 | 2.4 |
| \$750 or More | - | - | 143 | 10.7 | - | - |
| Totals | 627 | 100 | 1032 | 100 | 1379 | 100 |
| Median Gross Rent | \$143 | | \$378 | | \$499 | |

Source: 1990, 1980, 1970 Census Data
*All figures have been adjusted for inflation

DOWNTOWN LOWELL MASTER PLAN



River Place Towers

Photo: Higgins & Ross



Market Mills

Photo: DPD



Ayer Lofts

Photo: DPD

Table 3.10: Downtown Lowell Housing Stock

| Address | Development Name | Total Units | Subsidized Units | Boarding House Units | Funding Source | Program | Condo Units |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| 27 Bridge Street | | 4 | | | | | |
| 70 Bridge Street | Sirk Building | 89 | | 89 | | | |
| 159 Bridge Street | Mass Mills I | 160 | 160 | | DHCD | RDAL | |
| 169 Bridge Street | Mass Mills II | 120 | 120 | | DHCD | RDAL | |
| 45 Central Street | Townhouse of Lowell | 96 | 96 | | HUD | 221(D)(4) | |
| 216 Central Street | | 5 | | | | | |
| 249 Central Street | | 2 | | | | | |
| 278 Central Street | | 24 | | 24 | | | |
| 150 Father Morissette Blvd | North Canal Apartments | 151 | 151 | | DHCD | LIGTC | |
| 19 Hurd Street | | 6 | | | | | |
| 19 Hurd Street | | 1 | | | | | |
| 73 Market Street | Father John Apartments | 38 | 38 | | HUD | 221(D)(4) | |
| 27 Market Street | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| 199 Market Street | | 2 | | | | | |
| 200 Market Street | Canal Place I & II | 175 | 53 | | MHFA | SEC 8 | 122 |
| 246 Market Street | Market Mills Apartments | 230 | 230 | | MHFA | SEC 8 | |
| 256 Market Street | Market Mills Apartments | 82 | | | | | |
| 345 Market Street | | 11 | | | | | |
| 387 Market Street | | 7 | | | | | |
| 509 Market Street | | 5 | | | | | |
| 523 Market Street | | 6 | | | | | |
| 2 Merrimack Street | Sun Building | 46 | 46 | | HUD | 221(D)(4) | |
| 16 Merrimack Street | | | | | | | |
| 256 Merrimack Street | The Wentworth | 40 | 40 | | HUD | 221(D)(4) | |
| 360 Merrimack Street | | 2 | | | | | |
| 364 Merrimack Street | | 2 | | | | | |
| 368 Merrimack Street | | 21 | | 21 | | | |
| 441 Merrimack Street | Majestic Apartments | 34 | 34 | | HUD | 236-H | |
| 442 Merrimack Street | Merrimack St Apartments | 12 | 12 | | DHCD | LIGTC | |
| 450 Merrimack Street | | 5 | | | | | |
| 462 Merrimack Street | | 5 | | | | | |
| 463 Merrimack Street | | 14 | | | | | |
| 474 Merrimack Street | | 19 | | 19 | | | |
| 484 Merrimack Street | | 15 | | 15 | | | |
| 492 Merrimack Street | | 6 | | | | | |
| 540 Merrimack Street | | 4 | | | | | |
| 158 Middle Street | Ayer Lofts (Barker Building) | 12 | | | | | 12 |
| 172 Middle Street | Ayer Lofts (Ayer Building) | 39 | | | | | 39 |
| 19 Paige Street | | 6 | | | | | |
| 72 Prescott Street | Southwick Block Apartments | 28 | 28 | | HUD | 221(D)(4) | |
| 115 River Place | River Place Towers | 349 | 349 | | MHFA | 13A | |
| 128 Warren Street | Bagshaw Mills | 22 | | | | | |
| Total Units | | 1,894 | 1,357 | 168 | | | 174 |
| % of Total | | 100.0% | 71.6% | 8.9% | | | 9.1% |

Source: DPD Survey 2000

Subsidized Housing in Downtown Lowell

Downtown Lowell contains a disproportionate number of units subsidized by government affordable housing programs. Of the 1,894 housing units that currently exist in the Downtown planning area, 1,357 units (71.7%) are subsidized. In comparison, only 12.7% of housing units in the entire city of Lowell are subsidized. These units are subsidized through a wide variety of housing programs administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency. In addition, another 168 (8.87% of total housing units) are boarding house units. A map of the location and number of subsidized housing units in the Downtown is shown in **Figure 3.6**.

Lowell's stock of subsidized housing was found to be surprisingly concentrated in the Downtown. Over 36% of the Lowell's subsidized housing stock is located within the Downtown Planning Area. Furthermore, over 75% of the subsidized housing stock city-wide is located within Census Tract 3101.

This concentration of subsidized housing has implications for the Downtown Lowell economy. While the residential population of Downtown Lowell is significant and growing, the dominance of subsidized units and the relative low income of the tenancy limit the type and amount of retailers that would consider a location in Downtown Lowell. Incomes may not be great enough to support many retail stores. Unfortunately, retail concepts that can service this market well, such as pawnshops and "dollar stores," are viewed by many as unsupportive to efforts to attract visitors and tourist with greater buying power to Downtown Lowell. Once completed, the redevelopment of the Sirk Building will transform a boarding house into another significant concentration of subsidized housing, further exacerbating the trend.



Massachusetts Mills: a mixed-income residential complex located at the confluence of the Merrimack and Concord River

Institutional

Institutional uses, including governmental agencies, schools, churches and nonprofit organizations have a large and growing presence in Downtown Lowell. Many of the largest land owners within the Downtown Planning Area include those that are institutional in nature, including the City of Lowell and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Although many consider occupancy by so many nontaxable uses as a negative for Downtown Lowell, recent experience suggests that the opposite is true. With the exodus of such long time shopping anchors such as the Jordan Marsh and Cherry, Webb and Torrance department stores, it has been the institutional uses which have stabilized the economy of Downtown Lowell. Active development in Downtown Lowell by the National Park Service and Middlesex Community College have provided new anchors of activity. Recent efforts by the City and its partners to develop LeLacheur Park and the Tsongas Arena have brought Downtown Lowell considerable exposure and new energy.

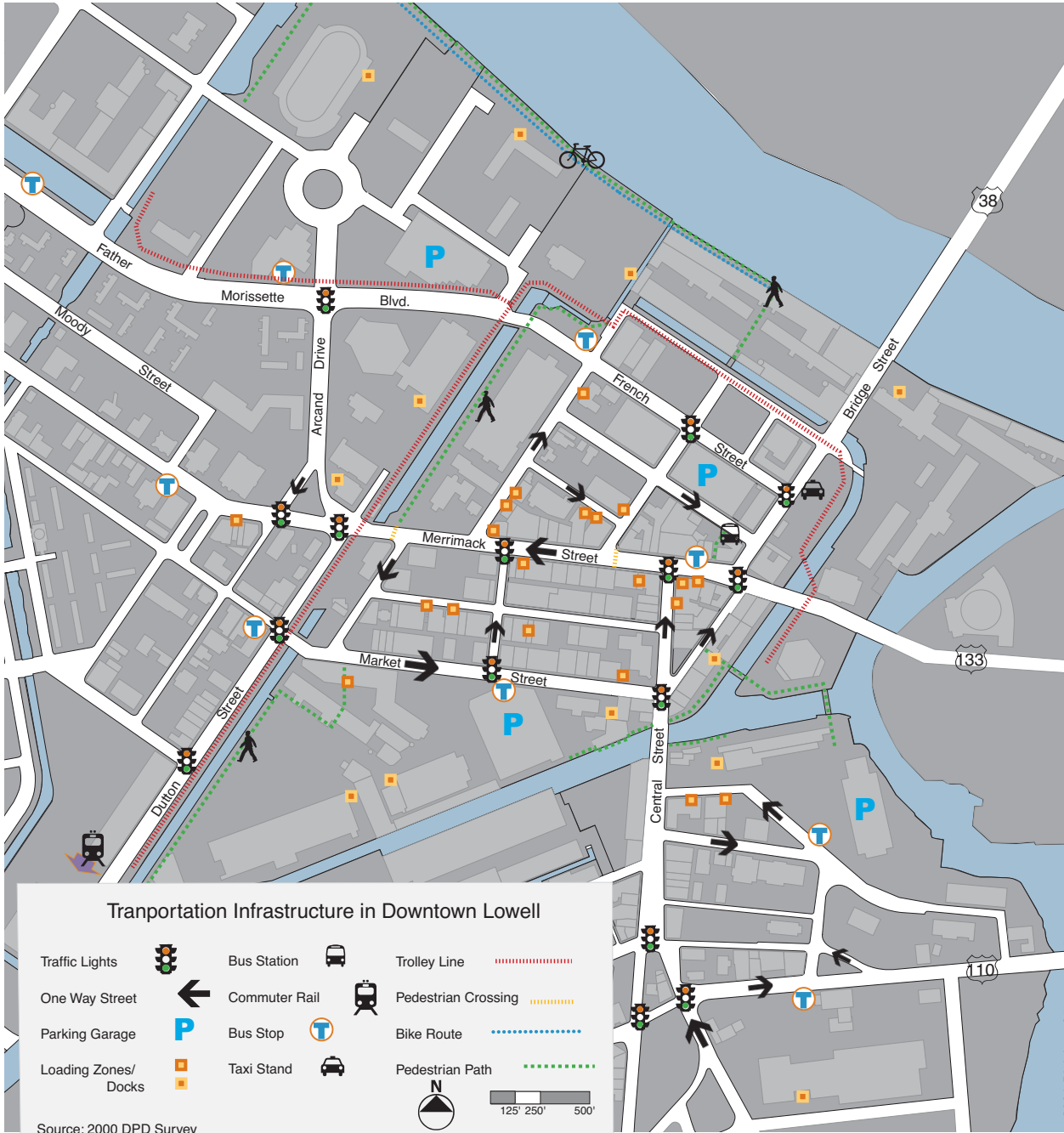
However, the expansion of institutional uses has caused some problems. A number of institutions that have begun to occupy the limited amount of 1st floor retail space in the Downtown is particularly concerning. Of the 549,624 square feet of retail space in the Downtown Retail-Office Core, 14.56% (80,032 square feet) was occupied by an institutional use. While this number is not extremely high, 26,975 square feet of this space was first occupied by these institutions in 1999 or 2000, demonstrating that this trend is both recent and growing.

Industrial

Industrial uses have a minimal presence in the Downtown Planning Area. Only a large factory, owned and operated by the Freudenberg Non-wovens Group on Dutton Street, the newspaper printing facility operated by the Lowell Sun Publishing Company on Prescott Street, a warehouse located behind the offices of Keyspan on Market Street and small automobile repair garages on Church Street, Green Street and Brookings Street are left to uphold Downtown Lowell's industrial legacy.

The long-term future of industrial uses within the Downtown Planning Area appears precarious. The Lowell Sun has recently announced that it will relocate its printing facility to a new modern industrial building in Ayer, Massachusetts and the garage on Brookings Street is scheduled to be demolished and relocated as part of the renovation of the adjacent Sirk Building. Conversion of industrial spaces to other uses will likely continue in the future.

Figure 3.7: Transportation Infrastructure



Automobile Circulation

The ability for automobiles and trucks to gain access to the stores and businesses in Downtown Lowell is of critical importance to the success of the Downtown Lowell economy.

The City of Lowell hired Pennoni Associates Inc., to undertake an evaluation of traffic flow within the Downtown area. The primary intention of the evaluation was to determine if intersection operations could be improved to facilitate safer and more efficient traffic flow through and within Downtown Lowell.

The firm undertook a comprehensive study of traffic and pedestrian patterns within Downtown Lowell that included the following elements:

- An evaluation of 17 signalized and 18 unsignalized intersections to assess current operating conditions.
- Traffic counts of vehicular volume by turning movement, heavy vehicle volume (truck & bus) by turning movement, and pedestrian activity;
- Capacity analyses for the study area intersections during the hours of 7:00 AM to 10:00 AM, 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM, and 1:30 PM to 6:00 PM on a typical weekday, and between the hours of 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM on a typical Saturday.
- Collection of 24-hour volume, vehicle classification, and speed data for two typical weekdays and a typical Saturday using automatic traffic recorders (ATRs) at nine separate places within the study area
- Evaluation of accident patterns at the study area intersections for the last 3-year period (1998-2000) in an effort to identify correctable patterns.

Existing Traffic Data

Cars gain access to Downtown Lowell by seven major arteries, which feed a one-way, counterclockwise loop of traffic formed by Merrimack Street, Dutton Street, Market Street and Central Street. All Downtown Lowell traffic generally feeds through this loop, regardless of whether the motorist intends to park in Downtown Lowell or is commuting through Downtown Lowell. Automobile traffic appears to be at its worst, during predictable morning and evening commuting times, as well as mid-afternoon, coinciding with the afternoon release time at Lowell High School.

In order to identify traffic issues, capacity analyses were performed for the study area intersections in accordance with methodologies outlined in the Highway Capacity Manual, last revised 2000. These analyses were completed for the Weekday AM peak hour, Week-

Manual turning movement counts were conducted for the following study area intersections:

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Merrimack Street and Arcand Drive</i> | <i>Central Street and Middle Street,</i> |
| <i>Merrimack Street and Shattuck Street,</i> | <i>Bridge Street and Paige Street,</i> |
| <i>Merrimack Street and Kirk Street,</i> | <i>Gorham Street and Appleton Street,</i> |
| <i>Merrimack Street and Palmer Street,</i> | <i>Bridge Street and French Street,</i> |
| <i>Merrimack Street and John Street,</i> | <i>Bridge Street and VFW Highway,</i> |
| <i>Merrimack Street and Central Street,</i> | <i>Bridge Street and West 6th Street,</i> |
| <i>Merrimack Street and Bridge Street,</i> | <i>Market Street and Dutton Street,</i> |
| <i>Merrimack Street and Prescott Street,</i> | <i>Market Street and Shattuck Street,</i> |
| <i>Central Street and Sheraton Way,</i> | <i>Market Street and Palmer Street,</i> |
| <i>Central Street and Appleton Street,</i> | <i>Middle Street and Shattuck Street,</i> |
| <i>Central Street and Middlesex Street,</i> | <i>Middle Street and Palmer Street,</i> |
| <i>Central Street and Jackson Street,</i> | <i>Kirk Street and Lee Street,</i> |
| <i>Central Street and Hurd Street,</i> | <i>Kirk Street and Paige Street,</i> |
| <i>Central Street and Warren Street,</i> | <i>Kirk Street and French Street,</i> |
| <i>Central Street and Market Street/ Prescott Street,</i> | <i>John Street and Lee Street,</i> |
| | <i>John Street and Paige Street,</i> |
| | <i>John Street and French Street,</i> |
| | <i>Dutton Street and Market Street,</i> |
| | <i>Dutton Street and Broadway,</i> |
| | <i>Dutton Street and Fletcher Street</i> |

The following locations were selected for placement of the ATRs:

Merrimack Street, between John Street and Central Street (1-way);
Central Street, between Warren Street and Market Street (2-way);
Bridge Street, between French Street and the Cox Bridge (2-way);
Market Street, between Shattuck Street and Palmer Street (1-way);
Middle Street, between Palmer Street and Central Street (1-way);
Shattuck Street, between Merrimack Street and Middle Street (1-way);
Kirk Street, between Merrimack Street and Lee Street (1-way);
John Street, between Paige Street and Lee Street (2-way);
Paige Street, between Bridge Street and John Street (2-way).

day PM peak hour, Weekday midday peak hour and the Saturday midday peak hour. **Tables 3.11 and 3.12** summarize the results of the capacity analyses for the overall intersection level of service and delay in seconds. The existing traffic signal timings are compared with optimized traffic signal timing and coordination settings for each intersection and corridor. In a number of cases, traffic backups occur simply due to poorly timed traffic signals. As can be seen, many situations where deficient levels of service exist can be remedied simply by making signal timing adjustments.

Table 3.13 summarizes the results of the capacity analysis for each unsignalized intersection in Downtown Lowell. As can be seen, there are several areas that exhibit deficient levels of service (Level of Service E or F).

**Table 3.11: Level of Service Summary
Weekday Peak Hours - Signalized Intersections**

| Intersection | Weekday AM Peak | | Weekday PM Peak | |
|---|-----------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Existing | Proposed | Existing | Proposed |
| 1. Merrimack St & Arcand Dr, Dutton St | E (55.3) | C (20.6) | E (55.9) | C (22.0) |
| 2. Merrimack St & Arcand Dr, Worthen St | B (15.2) | B (12.4) | C (21.5) | A (9.5) |
| 3. Merrimack St & Palmer St | A (7.4) | A (6.3) | B (10.1) | B (10.6) |
| 4. Merrimack St & Central St | B (16.2) | B (14.0) | B (16.9) | B (15.4) |
| 5. Merrimack St & Bridge St/Prescott St | D (50.8) | B (16.5) | F (82.9) | D (35.0) |
| 6. Central St & Appleton St | A (7.1) | A (6.1) | B (12.8) | A (8.2) |
| 7. Central St & Middlesex St/ Green St | B (18.6) | B (16.8) | C (25.8) | B (14.9) |
| 8. Central St & Market St/Prescott St | E (60.6) | D (37.6) | F (130.8) | D (54.9) |
| 9. Gorham St & Appleton St | B (16.2) | B (14.2) | A (9.7) | B (18.8) |
| 10. Bridge St & French St | B (10.5) | A (7.2) | A (8.1) | A (9.4) |
| 11. Market St & Dutton St | B (16.7) | B (14.5) | B (16.9) | B (13.2) |
| 12. John St & French St | A (8.9) | A (6.4) | B (16.7) | B (18.8) |
| 13. Route 38 and East Merrimack St | C (23.7) | B (12.1) | C (27.9) | C (27.8) |
| 14. Bridge St and VFW HWY | F (109.3) | F (91.0) | F (108.4) | F (103.5) |
| 15. Bridge St and West 6th St | B (14.8) | A (9.1) | B (11.0) | B (10.8) |
| 16. Dutton St and Broadway | C (26.8) | B (15.8) | D (36.7) | B (16.4) |
| 17. Dutton St and Fletcher | B (17.2) | B (16.3) | A (7.6) | A (6.1) |

Overall intersection Level of Service (Delay in seconds)

**Table 3.12: Level of Service Summary
Weekday (Mid-day) & Sat. - Signalized Intersections**

| Intersection | Weekday (Mid-day) | | Saturday | |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | Existing | Proposed | Existing | Proposed |
| 1. Merrimack St & Arcand Dr, Dutton St | D (35.2) | B (17.6) | D (42.4) | B (16.2) |
| 2. Merrimack St & Arcand Dr, Worthen St | B (18.0) | B (13.2) | C (20.6) | B (12.1) |
| 3. Merrimack St & Palmer St | A (7.5) | A (6.8) | A (8.8) | A (9.7) |
| 4. Merrimack St & Central St | B (17.0) | B (13.6) | B (13.7) | B (14.9) |
| 5. Merrimack St & Bridge St/Prescott St | D (41.7) | B (12.0) | D (38.1) | B (11.6) |
| 6. Central St & Appleton St | A (6.0) | A (5.4) | A (6.5) | A (6.3) |
| 7. Central St & Middlesex St/ Green St | C (21.9) | B (13.7) | C (31.7) | B (13.1) |
| 8. Central St & Market St/Prescott St | F (104.5) | D (42.8) | F (94.8) | D (39.2) |
| 9. Gorham St & Appleton St | A (9.0) | B (12.2) | A (9.7) | B (10.7) |
| 10. Bridge St & French St | A (8.2) | A (8.0) | A (7.6) | A (9.3) |
| 11. Market St & Dutton St | B (10.6) | A (9.4) | B (17.1) | A (9.6) |
| 12. John St & French St | B (15.8) | B (10.8) | B (10.8) | A (8.8) |
| 13. Route 38 and East Merrimack St | A (8.2) | A (7.3) | A (8.4) | A (8.4) |
| 14. Bridge St and VFW Highway | C (27.9) | C (24.0) | C (21.7) | B (18.0) |
| 15. Bridge St and West 6th St | A (7.6) | A (6.9) | B (10.7) | A (9.7) |
| 16. Dutton St and Broadway | C (22.1) | B (11.2) | C (33.0) | B (16.8) |
| 17. Dutton St and Fletcher | A (8.8) | A (8.3) | B (10.1) | A (9.3) |

Overall intersection Level of Service (Delay in seconds)

Accident Analyses

The two intersections that experience the most accidents during the three-year period include:

- Merrimack Street & Arcand Drive/Dutton Street/Worthen Street (43 accidents);
- Central Street & Market Street/Prescott Street (33 accidents).

Both of the above intersections have high volumes, undesirable roadway alignment, and high pedestrian activity. Typically, improvements to the delineation of travel lanes and advanced lane control signing would result in a reduction in accidents at these and other intersections.



Crosswalks at the intersection of John Street and Merrimack Street

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD

**Table 3.13: Level of Service Summary
Weekday and Sat. Hours Unsignalized Intersections**

| Intersection | AM Peak | Off Peak | PM Peak | SAT Peak |
|---|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1.Merrimack St & Shattuck St | FREE | FREE | FREE | FREE |
| 2.Merrimack St & Kirk St | FREE | FREE | FREE | FREE |
| 3.Merrimack St & John St | F (51.7) | F (61.3) | F (463.4) | D (33.1) |
| 4.Central St & Sheraton Way * | B (14.5) | B (13.5) | C (20.4) | C (16.1) |
| 5.Central St & Jackson St | D (33.7) | E (44.1) | F (84.8) | F (56.4) |
| 6.Central St & Hurd St | FREE | FREE | FREE | FREE |
| 7.Central St & Warren St | C (15.2) | E (47.2) | E (48.8) | E (40.8) |
| 8.Central St & Middle St | FREE | FREE | FREE | FREE |
| 9.Bridge St & Paige St | C (15.5) | C (16.8) | C (16.7) | C (15.0) |
| 10. Market St & Palmer St | D (27.4) | F (56.1) | F (394.3) | D (26.1) |
| 11.Market St & Shattuck St | D (34.9) | C (20.8) | D (26.4) | F (164.5) |
| 12.Middle St & Shattuck St | B (11.2) | B (13.0) | B (11.4) | C (15.8) |
| 13.Middle St & Palmer St | B (13.4) | B (13.9) | C (15.4) | C (16.3) |
| 14.Kirk St & Lee St | FREE | FREE | FREE | FREE |
| 15.Kirk St & Paige St | B (10.7) | A (9.1) | A (9.1) | A (9.2) |
| 16.Kirk St & French St | F (146.1) | C (15.2) | F (550.7) | C (16.2) |
| 17.John St & Lee St | C (23.5) | B (13.4) | F (66.8) | B (13.9) |
| 18.John St & Paige St | B (13.5) | B (12.9) | C (15.7) | B (12.1) |
| Stopped approach Level of Service (Delay in seconds) | | | | |

**Table 3.14: Pedestrian Volume –
Signalized Intersections**

| Intersection | Pedestrian Volume (9 hour total) |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Merrimack St & Arcand St, Dutton St | 1,776 |
| 2. Merrimack St & Arcand St, Worthen St | 1,625 |
| 3. Merrimack St & Palmer St | 2,428 |
| 4. Merrimack St & Central St | 4,585 |
| 5. Merrimack St & Bridge St / Prescott St | 2,232 |
| 6. Central St & Appleton St | 570 |
| 7. Central St & Middlesex St /Green St | 100 |
| 8. Central St & Market St/Prescott St | 3,284 |
| 9. Gorham St & Appleton St | 922 |
| 10. Bridge St & French St | 1,182 |
| 11. Market St & Dutton St | 887 |
| 12. John St & French St | 876 |
| 13. Route 38 and East Merrimack St | 4 |
| 14. Bridge St and VFW Highway | 1,287 |
| 15. Bridge St and West 6th St | 1 |
| 16. Dutton St and Broadway | 78 |
| 17. Dutton St and Fletcher | 213 |

**Table 3.15: Pedestrian Volume –
Unsignalized Intersections**

| Intersection | Pedestrian Volume (9 hour total) |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Merrimack St & Shattuck St | 961 |
| 2. Merrimack St & Kirk St | 1,473 |
| 3. Merrimack St & John St | 5,510 |
| 4. Central St & Sheraton Way | 925 |
| 5. Central St & Jackson St | 2,009 |
| 6. Central St & Hurd St | 2,140 |
| 7. Central St & Warren St | 669 |
| 8. Central St & Middle St | 3,149 |
| 9. Bridge St & Paige St | 1,226 |
| 10. Market St & Palmer St * | 2,084 |
| 11. Market St & Shattuck St * | 873 |
| 12. Middle St & Shattuck St | 569 |
| 13. Middle St & Palmer St | 2,381 |
| 14. Kirk St & Lee St | 1,373 |
| 15. Kirk St & Paige St | 1,026 |
| 16. Kirk St & French St | 1,789 |
| 17. John St & Lee St | 3,181 |
| 18. John St & Paige St | 1,586 |

* Intersection utilizes stop control for vehicular traffic, and signalized pedestrian crossings.

Pedestrian Circulation

Downtown Lowell is a traditional, dense, urban environment that is very accessible on foot. The core of Downtown Lowell and most major activity centers can easily be reached with a brisk walk in less than fifteen minutes. There are areas, however, where pedestrian circulation is constrained by conflicts with vehicular traffic.

Pennoni Associates evaluated the volume of pedestrians crossing seventeen signalized and unsignalized street intersections in Downtown Lowell. **Table 3.14** and **Table 3.15** summarizes the daily total pedestrian movements collected at each intersection for a nine-hour period. Eight intersections displayed particularly high levels of pedestrian activity, and are shown in bold. Not surprisingly, pedestrian volumes are highest at street intersections along Merrimack Street, Central Street and Market Street. Most of these intersections exhibit high volumes of vehicular traffic, as well.

Pedestrian Safety

The ability of individuals to comfortably and safely walk through the Downtown is a key advantage to those living, working and shopping in the Downtown. Although a large number of crosswalks exist in the Downtown, large traffic volumes often limit the safety of pedestrians walking throughout Downtown Lowell. In addition, large commercial vehicles cutting through Downtown Lowell increase pedestrian/vehicle conflicts.

Members of the Master Plan Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) often stated that pedestrians feel that crossing some Downtown Lowell streets is a dangerous, life-threatening proposition. CAC members felt that pedestrian traffic is not given enough preference over vehicular traffic at most Downtown intersections. In particular, Market Street was identified as a particularly tough street to cross safely. Improving safety and perceptions among pedestrians that Downtown Lowell is safe will substantially increase the desirability of Downtown Lowell to residents, tourists and workers alike.

Downtown Pedestrian Trails

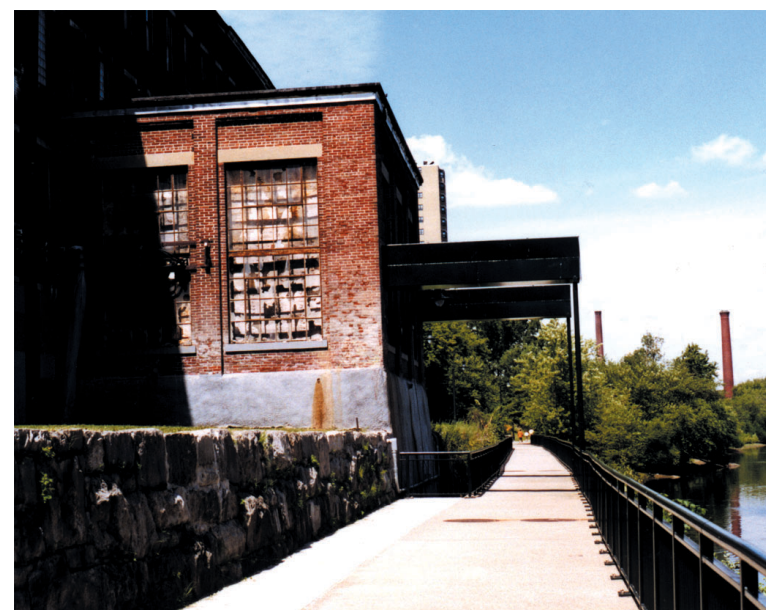
Over the past twenty years, the City of the Lowell, the Lowell National Historical Park and others have developed an extensive system of trails along the canals and rivers of Downtown Lowell. These trails connect attractions and activity centers throughout Downtown Lowell and provide special opportunities to access the waterfront and view wildlife and historic sites in a safe manner. Although many of these trails have become popular sources of recreation, some issues have arisen.

First, many consider access points to the Riverwalk hard to locate. Many participants of this planning process indicated a difficulty with accessing portions of the Riverwalk. Exist-

ing directional signs do not clearly identify access points. Also, the access point to the Riverwalk at the Boott Cotton Mills is often times locked, prohibiting access.

Also, development has been slow to occur on trailside locations. Because of poor access, waterfront portions of the Boott Cotton Mills and Massachusetts Mills have yet to be developed. This causes the many stretches along the Riverwalk and some canalwalks to feel isolated, and perhaps unsafe. Public uses that generate activity, such as retail or restaurants, must be emphasized on the ground floor of any waterfront development. This will allow pedestrians improved access to the water and also address feelings of isolation on portions of the Riverwalk where vacant buildings now sit.

Connections between the Downtown Core and the waterfront are poor. Historical development patterns have caused many of the pedestrian connections between the Riverwalk and Downtown Lowell to be inadequate. The Riverwalk and many of the canalwalks were constructed along the water's edge, reflecting the historical development of mills along the rivers and canals in Downtown Lowell. This configuration provides effective connections between activity centers located along the river, but not between the Downtown Core and the water. Logical pedestrian corridors such as John Street, Arcand Drive and Lucy Larcom Park are obstructed by buildings, unclear directional signs and development that is unfriendly to the pedestrian. New developments within Downtown Lowell should emphasize building better physical linkages between the Downtown Core and the riverfront. Pedestrian safety at roadway intersections along these corridors should be a priority.



A section of the Riverwalk behind the Boott Cotton Mills

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD

Public Transportation

Downtown Lowell residents and commuters are well served by an extensive system of public bus and light rail transportation options.

Lowell Regional Transit Authority

The LRTA operates a bus terminal on Merrimack and Paige Streets, one of two bus hubs on the LRTA system. Bus lines reach throughout the neighborhoods of Lowell and beyond from this Downtown Lowell hub. Commuter rail service connects Lowell with Boston and points in between at the Gallagher Intermodal Transportation Center, located on the edge of Downtown Lowell. The Gallagher Center is a 15-minute walk from most of Downtown and can also be accessed by a Downtown Shuttle loop operated by the LRTA. The major shortcoming of the bus service is its limited schedule—service is less frequent in the evening and on weekends.

The LRTA has recently announced a plan to consolidate its bus maintenance operations a site close to the Gallagher Center, Lowell's commuter rail station and intermodal transportation center. Along with this consolidation, the LRTA plans to move its Downtown Lowell bus hub to the Gallagher Center. At that time, a new, enhanced Downtown Lowell shuttle service will begin and operate at shorter intervals and extended hours.. The transformation is scheduled to be finished in two years.

This proposal will likely improve connections throughout the Downtown and improve the current traffic gridlock on Paige Street caused by the busses queuing. However, challenges will exist to replace the captive population of shoppers who currently wait for bus transfers at the Downtown Lowell hub. Many of these shoppers will not be directed to Downtown Lowell.

Lowell National Historical Park (LNHP) Trolley System

The LNHP operates a fixed-route historic trolley system that connects the Park's three major venues in Downtown. The existing system travels along a 'T' with the eastern leg traveling past the Boott Cotton Mills, Working People Exhibit and to the Eastern Canal Park and the lower locks of the Pawtucket Canal. The western leg travels to the Suffolk Mills by the Western Canal. The southern leg travels along the Merrimack Canal past the Visitor Center (Market Mills) and ends at Swamp Locks near the American Textile History Museum. Many throughout this planning process have identified the trolley as one of the most attractive things about Downtown Lowell.



New Downtown Shuttle from LRTA

Photo: Guin Moyle - DPD



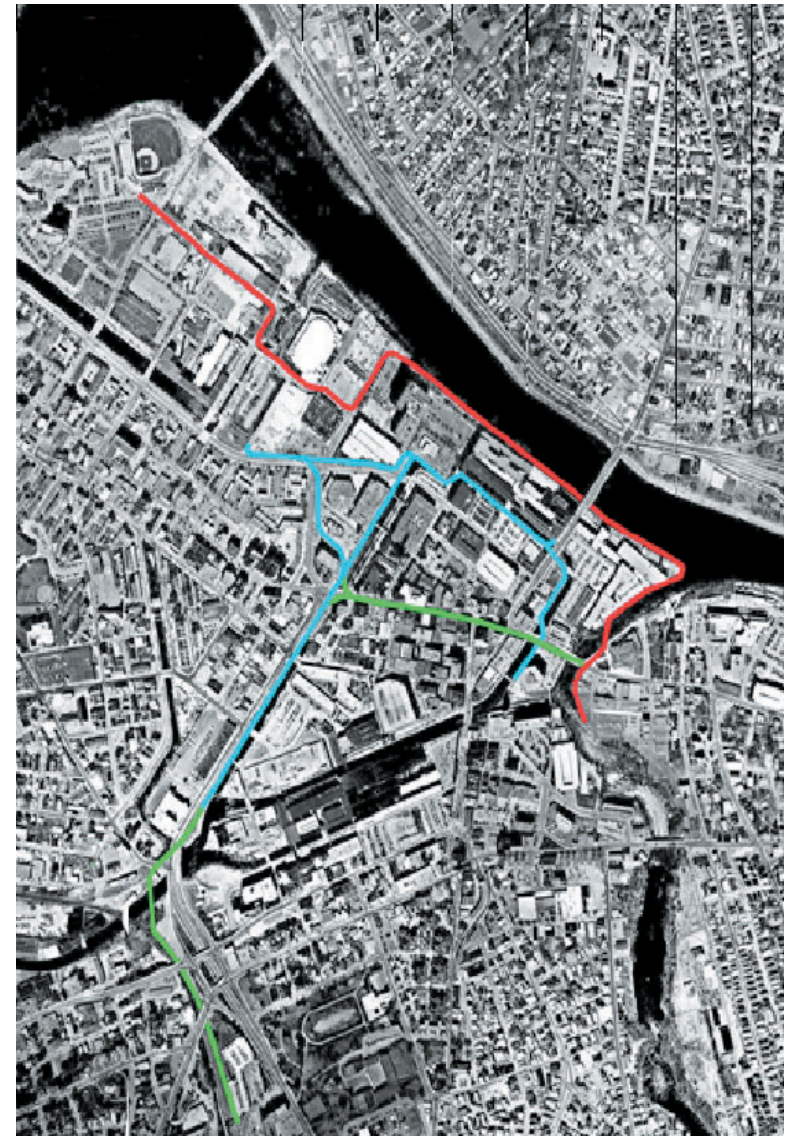
Vintage trolley system operated by the Lowell National Historical Park

Photo: Higgins & Ross

The current shortcomings of the service include a limited schedule and limited amount of venues served by the system. The LNHP is investigating the feasibility of expanding its existing trolley service to a year-round service on new trolley lines, including:

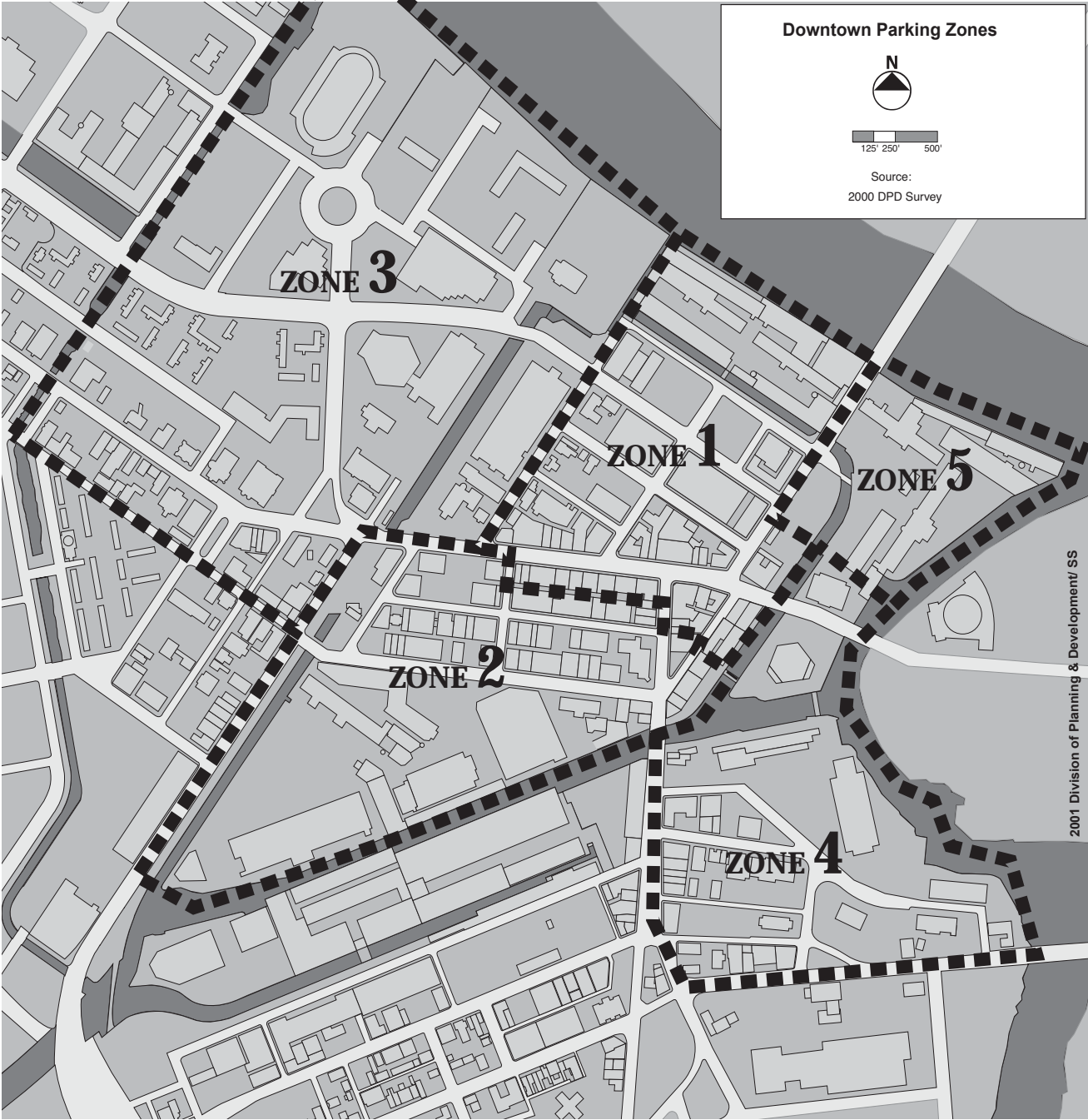
- a line that would connect the system with the Gallagher Center;
- an extension to the Lawrence Manufacturing Mill complex, the University of Massachusetts at Lowell campus, Tsongas Arena and LeLacheur Park;
- a new line running along the Riverwalk;
- the restoration of trolley service along Merrimack Street; and,
- a new line down Jackson Street, providing access to the Appleton Mills complex in the city's Jackson, Appleton and Middlesex Urban Renewal Areas.

Cities in which vintage trolley systems on fixed rail are located have experienced increased investment and economic development. A vintage trolley may provide a lure for many to move throughout the area by this mode despite their resistance to riding buses. This could add to the desirability of the areas served while reducing traffic congestion.



Map of the proposed expansion of the Lowell trolley system

Figure 3.8: Parking Zones



Parking

As nearly all Americans depend on the automobile for transportation, parking has become the lifeblood of almost every business activity. A survey of business owners in Downtown Lowell indicated that 86% of all retailers and 78% of all restaurants stated that their customers use a car in order to get to their business, highlighting the importance of parking. It is clear that any business recruitment initiative, planning or development study must comprehensively address this key issue. This Downtown Lowell Master Plan is no different.

Throughout this planning process, participants repeatedly identified parking as a major issue in Downtown Lowell. Concerns centered on the following general areas:

- Concern of the availability of parking Downtown generally, but a particular concern for the availability of short-term parking for retail customers;
- Concern over the cleanliness and safety of parking facilities;
- Confusion over sign systems (or lack thereof) to lead Downtown Lowell patrons to available parking.

It is critical that densely developed downtown areas like Lowell ensure that parking resources meet current consumer expectations regarding availability, safety, convenience, and cleanliness. Anything less will drive customers, workers and businesses away to more automobile-friendly suburban locations.

In order to further analyze these issues, the Master Plan Team conducted a comprehensive analysis of the supply and demand for parking in Downtown Lowell. The Master Plan team surveyed the total supply of parking and determined parking demand utilizing Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) methodologies. Further analysis focused on the availability of parking at different times of the day, the proximity of parking to buildings and development sites and the cost of parking. In addition, the condition of public parking facilities and the management of the parking system, including both public and private facilities were investigated.

Parking Availability

Parking analyses and surveys conducted by the Master Plan Team found that parking is becoming more scarce in Downtown Lowell. Public garages, for the first time are beginning to reach capacity. Shortages are most acute at the Lower Locks garage in the morning and throughout the day at on-street metered spaces.



Renovation of the Leo Roy Garage on Market Street

Figure 3.9: Walking Distance to Parking Garages



Three types of spaces supply all of the approximately 7,748 parking spaces in Downtown Lowell: privately-owned off-street parking lots, public off-street facilities and metered spaces on streets. A majority of the total supply (4,818 spaces) is provided by five off-street parking facilities owned and managed by the City of Lowell, including the Ayotte, John Street, Roy, and Lower Locks Garage, as well as the Davidson Street Parking Lot. Private property owners provide 2,512 parking spaces, primarily on surface parking lots at the edges of the Downtown Planning Area. An additional 418 short-term spaces are available at metered spaces on a number of streets within Downtown Lowell.

The Master Plan Team estimated that the demand for parking in Downtown Lowell Planning Area is approximately 8,197 spaces, exceeding the supply by 449 spaces. The parking “crunch” identified in this straightforward analysis is likely overstated. In reality, Downtown Lowell residents will generally not need parking at the same time as office and retail patrons. As a result, demand created from nighttime uses (residential) often can share the same space as daytime uses (office, etc.), thereby reducing the actual overall demand for spaces. Adjusting for shared parking use, it is still apparent that supply and demand are closely matched.

In order to investigate where parking needs are most acute, the Master Plan Team divided the Downtown Planning Area into five major zones (Figure 3.8), according to building proximity to the nearest parking garage. Supply and demand estimates for each zone were then developed (Table 3.18). It was revealed that the area around the Lower Locks Garage faces the most serious parking need.

Table 3.16: Downtown Parking Demand

| Type of Use | # of Businesses/ Residential Units | Area (Sq. Ft.) or # of Rest. Seats | Spaces Needed |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Retail | 37 | 109,700 | 337 |
| Office Space | 120 | 617,600 | 2,688 |
| Restaurant | 26 | 1,071 | 321 |
| Institutional | -- | 6,393 | 3,196 |
| Residential | 1,511 | -- | 1,677 |
| Total Demand | -- | -- | 8,219 |

Source: DPD Survey, 2001

Table 3.17: Downtown Parking Supply

| Type of Parking | # Of spaces |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Public Off-street parking | 4,818 |
| Private Off-street parking | 2,512 |
| On-street, metered parking | 418 |
| Total Supply | 7,748 |

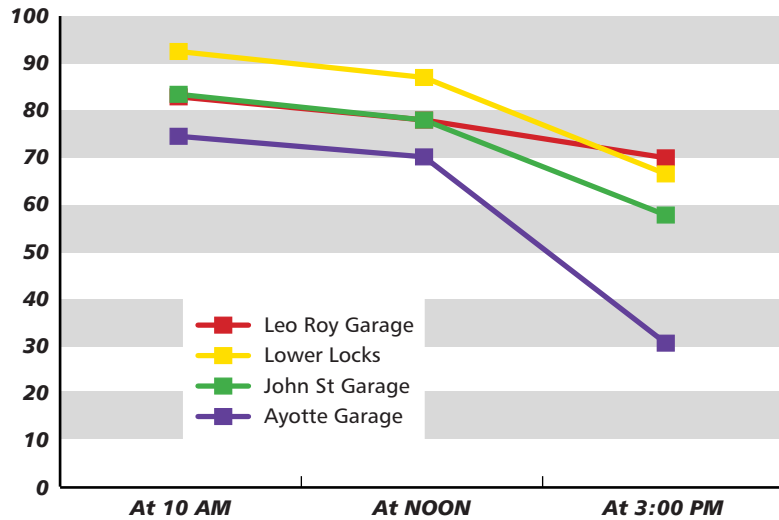
Source: DPD Survey, 2001

Table 3.18: Parking Equilibrium by Zone

| ZONE | Demand (# of spaces) | Supply (# of spaces) | Balance (+/- Spaces) |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| ZONE 1 | 2,171 | 1,754 | - 417 |
| ZONE 2 | 1,088 | 1,402 | + 314 |
| ZONE 3 | 2,368 | 2,258 | - 110 |
| ZONE 4 | 2,097 | 1,924 | - 173 |
| ZONE 5 | 473 | 410 | - 63 |
| Total | 8,197 | 7,748 | - 449 |

Source: DPD Parking Survey, 2001

**Figure 3.10: Weekday Occupancy Rate (% of Capacity)
Downtown Lowell Public Parking Garages**



Source: 2001 DPD Parking Survey



On-street parking on Middle Street looking east

A survey of weekday parking use revealed that garage use is particularly high during weekday mornings and early afternoons. Three of the four garages are close to capacity in the morning hours (Figure 3.10). Use of each garage decreases slightly in the afternoon and falls off dramatically in the afternoon and evening hours. This pattern likely reflects use by patrons of two Downtown Lowell institutions: the employees and students of Middlesex Community College and Lowell Public Schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the private lots and on street parking spaces follow the same trend.

In the evening and on weekends, use of the garages drops dramatically. During these times, parking use is limited to restaurant, bar and retail store patrons as well as residents. Use of the Ayotte Garage and the Davidson Street parking lot increases substantially at night during Tsongas Arena and Lowell Memorial Auditorium events, respectively. The additional capacity during these times could be an opportunity to encourage more residential development.

Short Term Parking

The availability of short-term, on-street parking is critical to the success of Downtown Lowell retailers, in particular. Shoppers, especially those which are making a short trip such as picking up an order, may be deterred if on-street spaces are not available. Suppliers making deliveries to retailers also will need short-term space to unload deliveries.

Today, the supply of on-street metered parking spaces is limited on Merrimack, Central, Middle and Market Street within the Downtown Core. In most cases, these spaces are tied up by Downtown Lowell employees and other users who feed meters for long periods of time, oftentimes all day.

Scarce enforcement of metered spaces combined with low parking fines provides a disincentive for daylong parking users to use off-street garages. In many instances, on-street parking is actually cheaper than parking in a public garage. The basic fine for parking at an expired meter is only five dollars—the same price for parking in a public garage for the whole day. During periods of lax enforcement, patrons will likely take their chances parking all day at a meter. This situation complicates efforts to attract customers to Downtown retail establishments.

Future Parking Availability

Future development in Downtown Lowell may be constrained by the current parking supply. Parking is always a major concern for developers and their investors. Both realize that potential tenants will be lost if secure, safe and available parking is not present close to development sites. The planned build out of the Boott Cotton Mills, for example, would increase demand for parking by an additional 1,200 spaces in Downtown Lowell. The

current parking supply cannot absorb any significant additional demand. More intensive management of parking facilities is warranted. In addition, the feasibility of constructing additional parking facilities will need to be investigated. The proposed Jackson Street garage should ease demand in the southern portion of Downtown Lowell.

Parking Convenience

The location of public parking facilities is inconvenient for many Downtown Lowell patrons. Workers prefer to park at facilities located close to the office—no greater than 300 feet from the front door of their work place.¹ Buildings located at significantly greater distances will be harder to market to office, residential and retail tenants. In comparison, the most remote parking spaces at a suburban office development rarely exceed this distance.

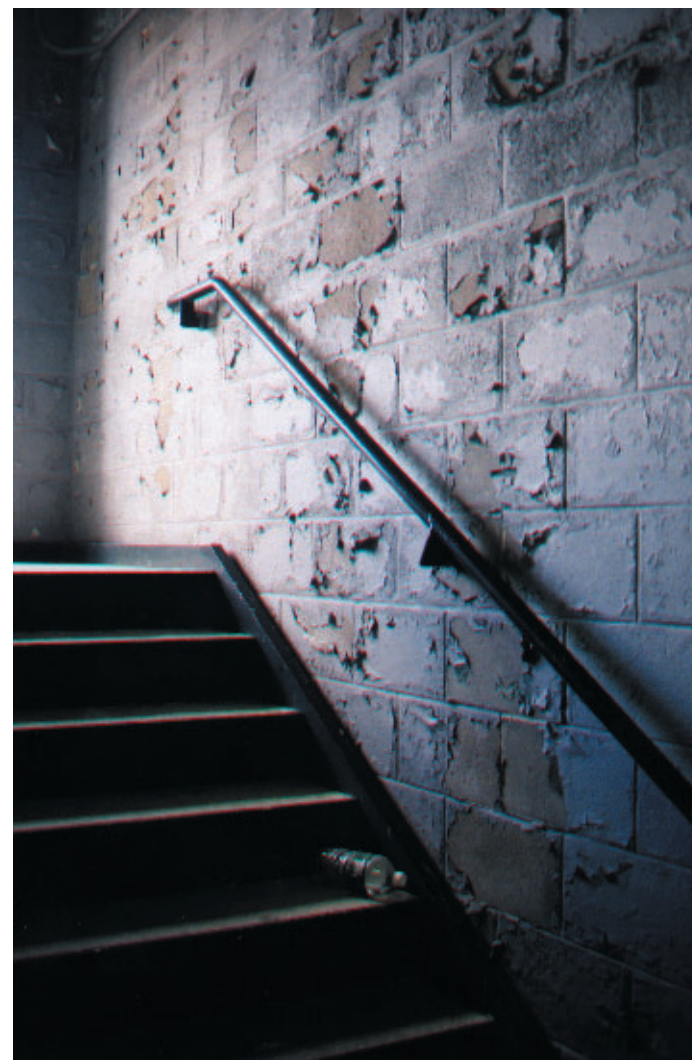
As is shown in **Figure 3.9**, a number of Downtown Lowell buildings are located at long distances to parking garages. While little can be done in the short term to make these buildings more convenient to garages, shuttle services to and from the garages could be considered in some cases. In the future, development efforts should consider the proximity to parking garages and whenever possible, seek to accommodate parking on site

The biggest complaint regarding Downtown parking is generally not the lack of parking, but the lack of clear directions to available parking facilities. Many business owners and residents have stated that those unfamiliar with Downtown Lowell are not aware of parking opportunities or do not utilize these opportunities. The lack of awareness of Downtown parking opportunities often leads visitors to hunt for the limited amount of on street parking in Downtown Lowell.

Downtown Lowell garages lack the ubiquitous symbol for public parking—a blue sign with a large letter “P”. Some of the garages sport a green sign, which appears to get lost in the brick background of the garage façade. The sign at the Ayotte Garage is often times shielded by vegetation. The lack of signs that point out parking opportunities ultimately leads many to underestimate the amount of available parking in the Downtown.

Garage Safety and Cleanliness

As the publicly owned garages hold a majority of the parking spaces in Downtown Lowell, their condition, appearance and perceived safety is very important. A customer can be lost forever to suburban shopping areas with one negative garage experience. Employees uncomfortable with parking their cars in unkempt garages may lead a company to not renew a lease for their downtown office space.



The staircase at the John Street Garage exhibits the lack of scheduled maintenance found in all of the Downtown Lowell garages

Photo: Sandra Swaile - DPD



John Street Garage vehicle entrance

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD

Historical crime data reveal that Downtown Lowell parking garages are safe, despite public perception. An analysis of crime incidences reported to the City of Lowell Police Department during 2000 revealed a remarkably small incident rate of any crime. The most prevalent crime, motor vehicle crime (breaking and entering, damage, larceny, tows) occurred only 11 times in the first six months of 2000, when over 138,000 cars utilized public parking facilities. On average, merely one incident was reported every five days throughout the system of public parking garages, including motor vehicle accidents.

While the garages have proven to be safe, to many patrons they don't feel safe. Inadequate and missing lights create shadows and darkness that causes many people, especially women, to be wary of parking in the garages. Lack of regularly scheduled security patrols in the past has also contributed to the problem.

The importance of public perception cannot be underestimated. Thankfully, the City of Lowell has begun to aggressively address many of these problems in the past year. Also, the expiration of separate garage management and security contracts over the next twelve months provides the City the opportunity to improve the quality of the garages, by including performance-based incentives that would reward the contractors for garage cleanliness and safety.

Public Realm

One clear strength of Downtown Lowell is the condition of the public realm. Twenty-five years of rehabilitation of the historic nineteenth-century commercial district yielded a very beautiful environment. Continued public investment in the public areas, including the streets, sidewalks, parks, street furniture and public art, has played a large role. In addition, careful regulation of private-sector building rehabilitations through the Lowell Historic Board, has raised the bar in terms of design quality found in Downtown Lowell.

Streetscape Reconstruction and Enhancement

The City of Lowell has taken a leadership role by committing millions to fund a continuous program of investments in the public realm. Since 1999, the City of Lowell has spent over \$2 million on the physical appearance of Downtown Lowell. The bulk of the City's investment has taken the form of a phased plan of repaving, line marking and lighting improvements. Phase I of these efforts, which addressed Merrimack Street, Kirk Street, John Street, Paige Street, Lee Street and Father Morissette Boulevard, was completed in the fall of 1999. In addition, funds were also spent on new benches (\$12,000), hanging baskets and flowers (\$11,000), and new tourism kiosks (\$43,000 with approximately \$22,000 in additional funds to be spent in the upcoming year). In addition, the City, in conjunction with some private funding sources, spent approximately \$240,000 on the City of Lights decorations and parade during the winter of 1999.

The City of Lowell Parks and Recreation Department has been lauded for their efforts to clean the sidewalks and streets of Downtown Lowell. A capable and professional maintenance staff patrols the streets of Downtown Lowell daily in an effort to keep the Downtown free from debris.

Design Regulation

The Lowell Historic Board administers design review standards that help ensure that rehabilitation, new construction, and other physical changes respect the architecture and character of Downtown Lowell. The power of these regulations are supported by state law, and requires that no City department, board, or commission issue permits, variances, or approvals within the Downtown Lowell Historic District until the Historic Board has first issued its approval and/or granted a Historic Permit.

Riverwalk

The recent construction of the Riverwalk, a multiuse path along the Merrimack River, has been a very positive addition to the public realm within Downtown Lowell. Similar to improvements initiated by the State Heritage Park and the Lowell National Historical Park



Detail found on the Cherry Webb & Touraine building on the corner of Merrimack Street and John Street

Photo: Guin Moyle- DPD



Persistent trash and debris found in the alleyways of Downtown Lowell

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD

over the past decades, it improves public access to the water and enhances the physical environment surrounding the storied mills of the North Canal Area, just north of Downtown Lowell.

Public Realm Issues

Although the physical appearance of Downtown Lowell compares very favorably to other downtown areas in the region, some issues exist. Minor issues arise in winter as sidewalks are not cleared after snow or ice storms. At other times, inadequate trash and garbage storage and spot graffiti is uncovered. While some businesses and building owners do a good job of maintaining the common areas of their properties (i.e. sidewalks and alleys), other stretches of sidewalks and alleys are quite hazardous and filthy.

Canal Debris

Despite periodic cleaning, the canals of Downtown Lowell are often cluttered with trash. A universal problem for all cities with canals, trash unfortunately detracts from the positive appearance of the rest of Downtown Lowell.

Alleyways

Despite the good intentions of a number of property owners, the alleys of Downtown Lowell are often littered with debris and unsecured trash dumpsters. Although alleyways are not meant to be a feature attraction, these areas, and their conditions, are nonetheless very visible to pedestrians walking along Shattuck Street, Palmer Street and Middle Street.

Downtown Bus Stop

A number of participants in this Master Plan process cited the bus stop at the intersection of Merrimack Street and Central Street as an issue within the public realm. The sidewalk in front of the stop on Merrimack Street, and the alleyway connection to Paige Street, are often cluttered with trash. Additionally, the large buses queuing on Merrimack Street, Paige Street and John Street create an unappealing and intimidating environment for pedestrians and motorists alike.

Downtown Organizations

Downtown Lowell is fortunate to have a large roster of dedicated volunteers and professional groups dedicated to the continued development and improvement of Downtown Lowell. These organizations play a variety of key roles, including marketing Downtown Lowell, cleaning the public spaces, providing investment capital to businesses, planning and managing events, and providing technical assistance and advocacy for Downtown Lowell businesses. A list of the major downtown institutions and their primary responsibilities includes:

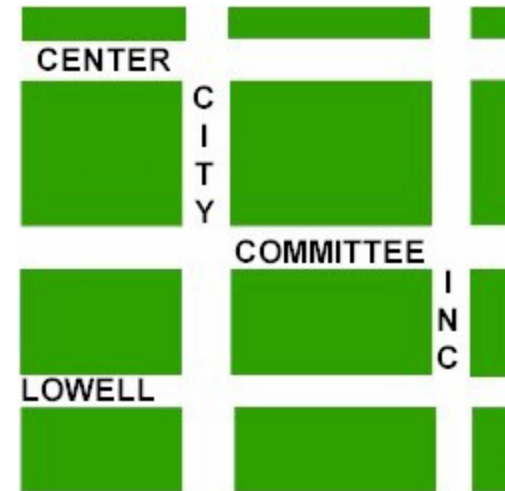
Center City Committee (CCC)

The CCC brings Downtown Lowell stakeholders together for weekly meetings to discuss and debate issues, goals and development objectives related to Downtown Lowell. In the past the CCC has also been instrumental in taking on larger initiatives, such as the establishment of the Farmer's Market.

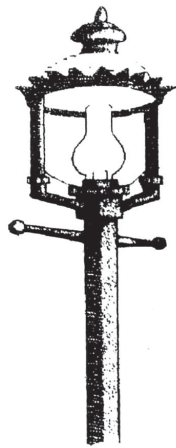
City of Lowell Division of Planning & Development (DPD)

As the City of Lowell's primary planning agency, the DPD has played a lead role developing and improving the image of Downtown Lowell. With a staff of over 35 planners, economic development professionals, project managers and assistants, the DPD has been involved in a number of initiatives to improve Downtown Lowell. Recent activities include:

- Management of a \$1.6 million Downtown public improvement program, which included street resurfacing, updated crosswalks (ADA compliant), brick sidewalks, tree planting, hanging planters, City Hall landscaping, Victorian lights, benches, and directional Kiosks;
- Facilitating the redevelopment of a number of key Downtown properties, including, Ayer Lofts, Cherry Webb & Torraine Building, the Bon Marché Building, among others;
- Providing technical assistance and marketing information to Downtown Lowell businesses.



DOWNTOWN LOWELL BUSINESS ASSOCIATION



City of Lowell: Other Departments

Departments such as the Police Department, Parking Office, Health Department, Inspectional Services Department and the Special Events Office provide basic services such as law enforcement, code enforcement, public parking management and enforcement and coordination of Downtown Lowell special events, respectively. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the administration and the upkeep of the public parks, planting islands, sidewalks, and public art located in the Downtown.

Cultural Office of Lowell (COOL)

Started up in the Fall of 2001, this organization was created by the City of Lowell in order to ensure that a viable voice for the Lowell arts and cultural community continued in the wake of the financial troubles of LOCA.

Downtown Lowell Business Association (DLBA)

The DLBA is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the needs of the Downtown Lowell business community, particularly retailers. Annually, the DLBA sponsors and organizes the popular City of Lights parade. The organization also purchases a group insurance policy that allows its members to utilize public sidewalks for special sidewalk sales and merchandizing events.

Downtown Lowell Neighborhood Association

This organization of Downtown Lowell residents meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues impacting the Downtown residential community.

Greater Merrimack Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB)

The CVB is a private, not for profit, membership-based organization responsible for the promotion of the Greater Merrimack Valley as a travel destination. One of the primary functions of the CVB is to market Downtown Lowell as a destination for meetings and conventions, trade shows, special events, group tours and leisure travel.

Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce

As the region's primary business advocacy organization, the Chamber boasts over 750 members region-wide. Along with sponsoring various Downtown activities and events, the Chamber also organizes the annual Chamber Business Expo, which brings thousands to the Tsongas Arena in the fall.

Lowell Historic Board

Charged with administering the design review regulations for the various historic districts encompassing Downtown Lowell, the Board has considerable influence on the eventual

look of all types of development that takes place in Downtown Lowell. In addition, the Board has the ability to police building owners within the historic districts, who fail to maintain property according to prescribed degrees of quality.

The Lowell Plan, Inc.

The mission of this organization is to promote economic growth and foster cooperation between the public and private sectors. The Lowell Plan has played a significant leadership role, raising over one-million private dollars to facilitate the development of the Tsongas Arena and support Lowell's aggressive marketing initiative, "There's a Lot to Like about Lowell." This organization has also provided staff support for a number of important development initiatives, including the Bon Marche renovation.

Lowell Development & Financial Corporation (LDFC)

As a sister agency to the Lowell Plan, the LDFC provides low interest loans to property owners and commercial tenants in the Central Business District. Since 1975, the LDFC has financed over 180 projects totaling over \$80 million in development. Currently, the LDFC works with the City of Lowell to implement the Downtown Venture Fund, a \$1.7 million loan pool designed to stimulate retail and restaurant development in the Downtown.

Lowell National Historical Park (National Park Service)

Established by a Congressional Act in 1978, the Lowell National Historical Park recognizes Lowell's unique contribution to the American Industrial Revolution. The Park operates three major exhibit spaces on separate sites throughout the Downtown, including the Visitor's Center at Market Mills, the Boott Cotton Mills Museum and the Turbine Exhibit at Suffolk Mill. These exhibits preserve and interpret key physical elements of 19th century manufacturing. These elements include representative textile mills, typical employee housing, and community institutions developed by manufacturing companies to assist in the needs of their workers.

Other major contributions of the National Park Service in Downtown Lowell include:

- A major multimillion dollar Canalway Development Program financed by both public and private sources that enhances the City's 5.6 mile historic canal system;
- Cosponsorship of the Lowell Folk Festival, which annually draws 50,000 to 140,000 people to Downtown Lowell for a three-day celebration of traditional folk arts and music;
- Sponsorship of a summer concert series;
- Management and operation of the historic downtown trolley system.





Public Art restoration

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD

Lowell Office of Cultural Affairs (LOCA)

LOCA was the primary voice of the arts community in Lowell. LOCA also organized a number of Downtown cultural events and also publishes a quarterly calendar of cultural events taking place in Downtown Lowell. Unfortunately, this organization has endured a number of setbacks recently, including the resignation of its Executive Director and a loss of significant operational funding. The long-term future of this organization is in doubt.

Lowell Small Business Assistance Center

This downtown office seeks to provide entrepreneurs with the tools and assistance necessary to start and sustain small businesses. The Center boasts a business library, free computer access and access to over 20 business counsellors.

Management Issues

This wealth of resources and plenitude of organizations is viewed by many as both a blessing and a curse. Although each organization plays a significant niche role, no organization focuses comprehensively on the Downtown and has the resources to affect major change, alone. This coalition approach has been very successful for facilitating “big picture” improvements such as the Tsongas Arena. However, relatively minor issues persist, including:

Lack of Coordination Among Downtown Organizations

The large number of groups involved to improve Downtown Lowell often leads to miscommunication and lack of coordination among these organizations. Issues slip between the cracks where responsibilities overlap. Permanent and effective lines of communication must be developed between various groups.

Consistent funding for the position of Downtown Manager/Coordinator could be a potential solution to this and other issues. On a number of occasions during the past five years, a Downtown Manager/Coordinator has been hired to help facilitate communication and cooperation among Downtown Lowell organizations and businesses. While some advances were made during the times this position was staffed, in each instance, funding eventually dried up. Without a full-time person to work on the small issues, the efforts of many of the Downtown Lowell organizations cannot be effective and sustained.

Unclear Maintenance Responsibilities

The element of Downtown Lowell that seems to suffer largest from this lack of coordination is maintenance of public areas. Confusion abounds regarding who or which organization is in charge of certain areas of maintenance of Downtown Lowell.

Many applaud the daily efforts of the Park and Recreation Department in cleaning the streets and sidewalks each day. However, in areas where individual property and business owners are in charge of maintenance, large disparities exist in how properties and their surroundings are maintained. While many property and business owners effectively perform maintenance tasks such as snow removal, trash removal and graffiti cleanup, other property and business owners do an inadequate job at these tasks. Particular areas of concern include the perpetual unkempt condition of the alleyways and the canals. Cleanliness of these remote areas can yield large results in terms of improving the image of Downtown Lowell.



Street maintenance of Middle Street by the City of Lowell DPW

Photo: Guin Moyle-DPD

